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The explosive ambition of Alex Del Piero

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The rebirth of Ajax

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SEPP BLATTER
Face to face with FIFA president

REIMS
European Cup's forgotten team

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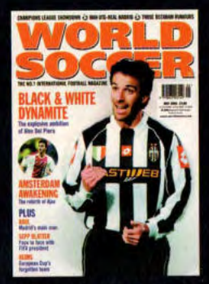

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May 2003

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IT MIGHT seem a little premature to be thinking about 2003's player of the year awards; we're only just into April, after all, and Arsenal have only just bowed out of the Champions League for another season. But trust me: you'll thank me for it, come December.

In a World Cup or European Championship year, it's always easier to select a winner of the individual end-of-year prizes – the best player at that summer's finals tournament is usually the clear and deserved victor. But in a non-tournament year like 2003, it's more difficult to pick the right man. People have short memories: a great goal scored in the domestic League in October will always garner more votes than an even better goal scored in the Champions League back in February.

We're entering the crucial phase of the season – the period that, particularly in the Champions League, should matter most when it comes to giving out the gongs in December. Sadly for Thierry Henry (page 16), Arsenal's Champions League exit has deprived him of further opportunities to press his already strong case on the European stage. But for the likes of Alessandro Del Piero (page 12) and the consistently brilliant Raul (page 14), further outstanding performances with their clubs will only add to their appeal.

Nowadays, the European Cup quarter-finals, and the resulting switch to knockout Cup football, mark a turning point in the season. We hope that our guide to the eight quarter-finalists, presented free with this issue, will help you to negotiate what should be an exciting finale.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor (gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com)

*** SAVE MONEY ON WORLD SOCCER SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER ON PAGE 30

Running on empty...Reims warm up for a Second Division game at the 7,000-capacity Stade Auguste-Delaune, which is rarely full

Europe's forgotten team

Keir Radnedge on the plight of Reims, once the crown princes of European football

AS Real Madrid, Manchester United and European club football's supporting cast raise the tension levels in the Champions League, talk of the football will be closely followed by considerations of the profits.

Nothing will be further from the minds of Ronaldo and David Beckham than the plight of little Stade de Reims deep in the French Second Division. Indeed, the two players may never have heard of the Champagne club. After all, their high-profile life has little connection with the part-timers who turn out weekly in front of a few thousand fans.

Yet without this singular club from the cathedral city in eastern France, neither Real Madrid and Ronaldo nor United and Beckham would be where they are today.

Football owes a historic debt to the French for their vision of globalisation long before the term was conjured up. The French inspired the creation of FIFA, the World Cup and the European Championship.

But without Reims and their champagne football in the 1950s the French would not have had the essential pre-requisite for their vision – a club around which to found the European club cups. Indeed, the game today would be very different – perhaps still dominated by national team competitions and national associations rather than by the greedily rich and all-powerful clubs.

Founded in 1931, Reims were the supreme club force in France just when Gabriel Hanot, editor of *L'Equipe*, proposed his European Champions Cup in 1955. They had been French champions three times in seven years, French Cup winners once and winners in 1953 of the Latin Cup, the immediate precursor of Hanot's baby.

Yet today, while Real Madrid plan to increase the Estadio Bernabeu's 95,000 capacity, Reims play in the modest Stade Auguste-Delaune with a capacity, rarely reached, of 7,000, with more than half standing. Madrid boast 20 internationals, including world-famous superstars from Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, England and, ironically, France; Reims hardly have 20 players in total and most of them are French unknowns plus a handful of assorted Africans, none of them internationals.

It could have been different. The twists of fate in the first European Cup Final in the old Parc des Princes in Paris in 1956 proved earth-shattering in football terms. Reims led 2-0 after 10 minutes and then Raymond Kopa, their mesmeric and creative centre-forward, had a shot cleared off the line. Later they led 3-1. Madrid hit back to lead 4-3. Two minutes from time Reims winger Jean Templin hit the bar. But Madrid held on for the first of five consecutive and a total of nine European Cup wins.

What might have been if Kopa had scored in the first half or if Templin's shot had been an inch lower? Instead, it was Madrid who headed onwards and upwards and Reims who were left to chase the dream in vain.

Madrid even signed Kopa, whom Reims replaced with Just Fontaine from Nice. They would be on opposite sides in the 1959 Champions Cup Final, when Kopa's Madrid beat Fontaine's Reims 2-0 in Stuttgart. After the match Kopa was sold back to Reims.

But the partnership with Fontaine rarely flourished at club level because of injuries.

Reims regained the French title but lost in the 1963 European quarter-finals to Feyenoord. The 1-1 draw in the old Parc des Princes was Reims' 24th and last appearance in Europe. The French game went into financial free-fall. A string of clubs went bankrupt, Reims among them. The club reformed but were relegated twice in the 1960s and finally vanished from the top division scene in 1979.

A four-division slide into part-time twilight was halted only in September 1996 when publicist Christophe Chenut took over as president. His marketing talents persuaded a number of sponsors to come on board, he reassured the local council that the club could fill their modest new Auguste-Delaune stadium and bought back many of the old trophies that had been auctioned off years earlier.

The revival worked out on the pitch, as well. This season Reims stepped back up into the full-time world of the French Second Division. Regaining parity with Real Madrid is not an option and not even a dream, however. The original Champions Cup Final rivals are now an impossible world apart. As Olivier Letang, Reims' general manager, says: "We have around 1,750 members and average around four to five thousand fans at our matches. It's not a lot but it's something to build on.

"The old players? Some of them still take an interest, though we don't see them here. But it's no problem, there is no point living in the past, is there?"

Eerily enough, a few weeks ago the surviving players from that era were reunited – at the funeral of their coach, Albert Batteux. Several even served as coffin-bearers. The club's stadium may have its name changed to honour his memory.

Reims may no longer be crown princes of European football, but the legend will linger on.

Famous days...Reims v Madrid (white) in 1956

Fitting the bill...Beckham's signature would be a major marketing coup for Real Madrid

Beckham rumours persist

THE draw for the Champions League quarter-finals, which paired Manchester United with holders Real Madrid, was overshadowed by growing speculation that Madrid will mount an audacious bid for United midfielder David Beckham in the summer.

Madrid sports director Jorge Valdano tried to deflect such talk, saying: "It's not time to speak about David Beckham. We're in the middle of a competition, with Manchester United around the corner. Any comment now could put us in a debate that would alter the game." But when pressed that people were bound to ask about Beckham, Valdano replied: "Let's say that taking into account the coups Madrid have carried off in the past few years, David Beckham seems to fit our project."

Valdano's comments sent the rumour mill into overdrive. The paper talk makes some sense, too: Madrid will buy only the world's best players, the biggest names. Beckham is the only man not already at Madrid who fits the bill – especially in marketing terms. A recent study commissioned by Madrid revealed only Beckham could increase the club's profile in the all-important Far Eastern market.

Officially, Madrid president Florentino Perez is unhappy that Beckham's name has slipped out, saying: "Nobody at Madrid is thinking about buying Beckham at the moment." But previously he has declared his admiration for Beckham, saying he is an "interesting" player. Such comments smack of the kind of cautious soundbites and outright denials previously offered about Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo. Perez is nothing if not an astute negotiator.

Already Spanish media mouths are salivating. While the Catalan press gleefully present Beckham as evidence that Luis Figo's Real career is finished, in Madrid they're sure there's room for both and they excitedly quoted Beckham's "honour" at being linked to the club. Needless to say, the fact Beckham insisted on "staying put" in Manchester was played down; his assessment that United, not Madrid, are the "world's best team" was ignored altogether.

Sid Lowe

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS DRAW

Ajax v Milan
Real Madrid v Manchester United
Internazionale v Valencia
Juventus v Barcelona

First legs to be played on April 8/9, return legs on April 22/23

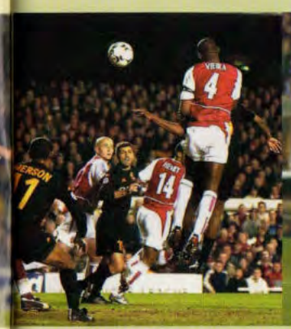
The month in pictures

● 04/03/03...UEFA launches a fresh initiative to combat racism with a conference in London

● 04/03/03...Aston Villa striker Dion Dublin apologises for his butt on Birmingham midfielder Robbie Savage

● 05/03/03...Brett Emerton is voted Oceania Footballer of the Year

● 11/03/03...Barcelona beat Leverkusen 2-0 to stay unbeaten in the Champions League



● 11/03/03...Arsenal draw 1-1 with Roma at Highbury

● 11/03/03...Inter and Newcastle draw 2-2 in the Champions League

● 12/03/03...Former Ireland manager Mick McCarthy is unveiled as the new boss of struggling Sunderland

Infamy, infamy...

They've all got it in for me. Controversial Ecuadorean referee Byron Moreno hits back at his critics

BYRON MORENO remains the "Most Hated Man in Italy." He has also been labelled that country's "Public Enemy No 1." His crime, of course, is to be a referee. And not just any referee but the one who earned so much infamy for his handling of the *Azzurri's* 2-1 defeat by co-hosts South Korea in last year's World Cup second round.

The Ecuadorean sent off golden boy Francesco Totti for diving and later awarded the Koreans a penalty, from which they equalised, five minutes from time. Korea then snatched a golden goal through Ahn Jung-hwan to send the Italians home raging at the perceived incompetence – and worse – of the 32-year-old from Quito.

Moreno went back to more controversy and a 20-game suspension for his handling, or mishandling, of a crucial domestic League match. FIFA launched an inquiry into claims from Italy that he had taken World Cup bribes, but he was cleared. Now, amazingly, he cannot wait to pick up the refereeing threads all over again.

He has even braved the fury of Italy and accepted an invitation to fly over and star on a couple of TV talk and quiz shows. FIFA clearance and Italian hospitality – albeit through gritted teeth – has underpinned Moreno's enormous self-confidence.

"It's very important both for me and the credibility of football," he says, expanding his case to take in the entire sport. "It shows FIFA cannot be influenced by one country, however powerful. On a personal level it means I can do again the thing I enjoy the most. I'm so grateful to our refereeing commission in Ecuador, who have always supported me. I won't let them down."

Moreno, to his credit, kept in training during the five-month suspension he collected for his controversial handling of an LDU v Barcelona League match. He says: "I always maintained a certain fitness level. Nothing too arduous, just enough to keep in basic shape. Then, once I got the green light, I put in a fortnight's strenuous work to get ready for the start of our league. The rest of the time I helped my father in his law firm. It's great to be back. I am more motivated than ever to show everyone how well I can do this job."

Hardly surprisingly, he refuses to be drawn on his prospects of refereeing at the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany. His immediate ambition is to be hailed No 1 in Ecuador again – the ranking that sent him to Korea/Japan in the first place.

He says: "Our federation has told me it's recommending I go back on the FIFA international list. Now I have to wait until the next review later this year. But I don't have a problem with FIFA any more. Its commission cleared me of all the lies that were spread about me – just as I expected. I am free to pick up my career where I left off in Korea."

Moreno blames not only Italian officials, players, fans and media for all the stories. "After the Korea v Italy game," he says, "a Japanese newspaper asked me if it was true I had made enough money to book a luxury holiday in Miami, pay off all my debts and buy a new Chevrolet.

"For me, taking bribes is the most serious accusation anyone can make against a referee. It was a disgrace. The truth was that I went to Miami for a holiday at the home of my sister, and I bought a car out of the $20,000 [£13,000] I earned from FIFA's pay and allowances at the World Cup. As for debts, well, I've still got them."

For Moreno, the basic problem was that he believes the Italians did not know how to lose. He says: "It's part of their game to blame everything that goes wrong on referees. You only need to read about their League every week. It's all about what referees are supposed to have done wrong. Nothing to do with the players, coaches or directors.

"They accused me of being mistaken in both sending off Totti and in awarding Korea their penalty. But anyone who challenges those decisions simply does not know the laws of the game. Take Totti: I cautioned him twice, perfectly correctly, the second time for simulation. That is a yellow card offence, it was his second yellow, so he had to be sent off. As for the penalty, one Korean was brought down by two Italians. That's blatant."

Picking up the threads...Byron Moreno

Moreno considers himself a mere scapegoat for Italy's failure. He says: "I saw newspaper reports from Spain, France, England, South America and Asia, and they mostly praised my performance. But the Italians wanted to distract attention from their own mistakes which led to their elimination.

"They weren't that good, in my opinion. In the first round they beat Ecuador, lost to Croatia and only just scraped a draw with Mexico. Against Korea, Christian Vieri – supposed to be worth multi-millions – missed two open goals. My fault? I don't think so.

"It's more or less win at all costs. Look at what happened with the Korean, Ahn, who scored the golden goal. Two days later he was sacked by his Italian club. That says it all. My conscience is clear."

Keir Radnedge

Talent Scout Republic of Ireland

Kevin Palmer on the country's brightest international prospects

WES HOOLAHAN
(Born: 10.08.83, Club: Shelbourne)
Tricky winger who completed a rapid rise to the top when called into the depleted senior Ireland squad named by caretaker boss Don Givens against Greece last November. Such a promotion may have come a little too soon, but more opportunities will surely arise.

LIAM KEARNEY
(10.01.83, Nottingham Forest, Eng)
Scored the winner for Brian Kerr's Under-20 side in a recent victory over France and looks to have all the raw materials to develop into a star. Quietly-spoken Dubliner who has been on the fringes of the Forest first team this season, though his fragile frame is still developing.

EAMON ZAYED
(04.10.83, Bray Wanderers)
The highly-rated forward may boast only half an Irish name, but his broad Dublin accent confirms he is green through and through. Son of a Tunisian, Zayed was called into the Under-20 squad by Kerr before he took over as national team manager. Has already had a stint in English football with Leicester.

STEPHEN BRADLEY
(19.11.84, Arsenal, Eng)
Capped at Under-15 and Under-16 level, the midfielder is making waves under the guidance of youth team coach and former Republic great Liam Brady at Highbury. Said to have turned down offers from Manchester United and West Ham to sign for Arsenal.

Scotland move...Hunt

NOEL HUNT
(26.12.82, Dunfermline, Sco)
Striker who enjoyed a fine season in the Eircom League with Shamrock Rovers and sealed a move to the Scottish Premier League in January. The Under-21 international, who cost Dunfermline a reported £150,000, made his debut against Rangers.

MARK ROSSITER
(27.05.83, Sunderland, Eng)
Veteran Republic forward Niall Quinn took Sligo-born Rossiter under his wing at the Stadium of Light and he has made great strides in the past few months. Capped at junior level, he has played a handful of first-team games for Sunderland this season.

KEVIN DOYLE
(18.09.83, St Patrick's Athletic)
Made his breakthrough in the St Pat's side in the recently concluded Eircom League season as he quickly established himself as a forward with real potential. Likes to run at defenders. National team boss Kerr is a confirmed admirer of his qualities.

WILLO FLOOD
(10.04.85, Manchester City, Eng)
Dubliner snapped up from the famous breeding ground of the Cherry Orchard club, and City manager Kevin Keegan has included him in his first-team squad. Midfielder with a touch of class; a regular junior international.

On loan...Partridge

STEPHEN KELLY
(06.09.83, Tottenham, Eng)
Named in the Spurs first-team squad by Glenn Hoddle earlier this season but currently gaining valuable experience on loan at Third Division Southend. Can play at the heart of the defence or at right-back and was an impressive member of Kerr's junior international sides.

RICHIE PARTRIDGE
(12.09.80, Coventry, Eng)
Long tipped to become an international star but hamstrung by years of frustration in Liverpool's reserves. Now proving his worth during a loan spell at First Division Coventry. Talented winger who scores spectacular goals, but in danger of running out of time in a bid to live up to his lofty billing.

Notes & quotes

"They simply don't have the necessary structure in terms of telecommunications, hotels and mainly the 12 to 14 decent stadia and training centres."

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira doubts the ability of Africa to stage the 2010 World Cup finals.

Doubting Carlos...Parreira

"I'm the one who decides. Whoever sees things differently can stay at home."

Portugal boss Luiz Felipe Scolari responds to complaints from Rui Costa and Luis Figo about the inclusion of FC Porto's Brazil-born playmaker Deco, a recently-naturalised Portuguese.

"Antonio has made giant steps forward this season. He can become a great, but he has to get his head right once and for all."

Roma president Franco Sensi predicts a glorious future for young midfielder Antonio Cassano, provided he cuts out some of his off-pitch antics.

"I need to express myself on the field. I cannot be satisfied with a place on the bench."

Brazilian World Cup-winning defender Edmilson finds life hard on the fringes at Lyon.

The month in pictures

● 12/03/03...Real Madrid turn on the style to beat Milan 3-1 and remain in contention for the Champions League

● 12/03/03...Dortmund celebrate a 3-0 victory over Lokomotiv Moscow

● 12/03/03...1860 Munich sack Austrian coach Peter Pacult after a run of poor results

● 12/03/03...Juventus score a dramatic last-minute winner to beat Deportivo La Coruna 3-2

● 14/03/03...Hamburg striker Naohiro Takahara is voted Japan's Player of the Year

● 16/03/03...Internazionale beat Como 4-0 to keep up the pressure on Serie A leaders Juventus

● 16/03/03...Rangers beat Celtic 2-1 to win the Scottish League Cup

Q&A: Radomir Antic

Barcelona's Serbian coach on his new challenge in Catalonia

Right place, right time...Raddy Antic

WORLD SOCCER: Were you surprised to land one of the biggest jobs in football?
RADOMIR ANTIC: No, I always knew the doorbell would ring one day. That's one of the reasons I stayed in Spain after I got the sack last time. It's got the best opportunities in football, and I wanted to be around for the day someone needed me.

You took over Barça at a very difficult moment.
Yes, if it hadn't happened I would probably still be in Marbella on holiday. But this is all part of life.

But Barcelona is a political minefield, isn't it?
If people concentrated more on the football and less on all the other stuff we might win more games. I hate this sort of stuff. It gets in the way of my work here. For example, I've heard I am supposed to have asked the board to buy German striker Miroslav Klose. Nothing could be further from the truth. After all, we have Patrick Kluivert. He has great experience and, at 26, is an ideal age.

Are you confident you can turn things around?
Yes, through working very hard, although the biggest problem is the football calendar – we have been playing every three days and have a lot of players injured. It is not easy to do this job; it looks easy but it's not. For Barcelona fans it is not enough to win – they want other things, they want to see the game played a certain way.

Where do you think Louis Van Gaal went wrong?
All foreigners have the responsibility to show themselves correctly with the language and so be able to communicate fluently and put yourself across well. But as well as the language you need to know about the culture – I think that is one of the reasons.

Were you worried by stories that Van Gaal was undermined by the dressing-room?
It never crossed my mind. I think the players backed the previous coach right up until the end. That wasn't the root of the problem. I just have to restore the players' confidence in their own ability, which is enormous.

So what is your priority?
Barcelona are a football and social institution. The club hasn't lost any of its status. It's just that results weren't up to scratch. So improving results has been my focus, with all my heart and soul and experience.

How do you judge your progress so far?
It's too early to say. I must admit I thought it would be easier than it's proved. I understand now why people talked about a team with two faces. We're working harder than ever and getting the results in the Champions League – but not in the Spanish League. At least I think I'm getting my idea over.

What is this 'idea'?
To turn Barcelona into potential champions, a team whose football entertains the fans.

Sometimes you criticise your players publicly. Don't you think it's better to keep your criticisms to the privacy of the dressing-room?
A manager gets plenty of public criticism, so why should the players escape? Anyone who doesn't like hearing the truth isn't going to go far either in the game in general or at this club in particular while I'm in charge.

Your most controversial player is Argentinian midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme. Van Gaal didn't know how to use him. Do you?
Riquelme, I remember, scored a wonderful goal in a pre-season game against Parma and then, in the next match, never had one shot on goal. You can't afford a player whose head is up one game and down another. If a player has talent he has a duty to show it; my job is to help him do that.

So, are you going to win the Champions League?
That's not my target. My focus is different: I want us to earn respect. If we have respect then we have a psychological advantage. At this level, the eight teams are so evenly balanced in terms of ability that other factors will kick in. If people are afraid of us, that's one such advantage.

Does keeping your job depend on winning the Champions League?
It won't make the slightest difference. We could win the Champions League, and I could be out. It's simple: we have presidential elections at Barcelona in the summer. The difficulty is that the candidates will each have to nominate who they want for coach and take it to the fans.

Tim Hanlon/Keir Radnedge

Keir Radnedge MEDIAWORLD

News and views from the world's press

ROUND ONE: Blatter v Daily Mail

SWITZERLAND: SEPP BLATTER has issued a statement on the FIFA website announcing his intention to sue for libel both the *Daily Mail* and the London paper's investigative sports reporter, Andrew Jennings.

Blatter has become increasingly irritated ever since the *Mail* published a number of stories in the run-up to last year's World Cup questioning the circumstances of Blatter's 1998 presidential accession and FIFA's finances.

The *Mail* had to publish an apology recently for not having noticed that the Swiss prosecutor's office had dropped all possible proceedings against Blatter. Virtually simultaneously, however, the *Mail* ran a lengthy story about Blatter's FIFA remuneration, to which he has taken exception.

This raises the fascinating prospect of Blatter having to visit the High Court in London to give evidence and be cross-examined about his and FIFA's finances.

ROUND TWO: Menotti v Ronaldo

ARGENTINA: "What I meant when I said Ronaldo couldn't play football is that, for all his great abilities, he remains much too dependent on someone else winning and giving him the ball. He doesn't make enough effort himself to contribute to the overall team effort. A player like that can disrupt the team ethic."
– former Argentina coach Cesar Luis Menotti explains his criticism of Ronaldo in Ole.

'Lack of effort'...Ronaldo

Terry's all played out

ENGLAND: "Will I work in football again? When you leave a job like this, your reaction tends to be: 'Stuff it, that's my lot.' But a few hours have passed since then and why should I make those decisions now? I won't sit at home worrying, that's for sure. I'll get on with other things in my life, maybe get a season ticket at a club, and if something came along, who knows? I'm past taking a job just to have a job, though. I'm not going to rope myself off in a corner and say never again. But I don't want to be Red Adair for the rest of my life. I'm just thankful I worked when being manager of a club meant something. I'm not sure it does these days."
– Terry Venables gives the News of the World *his reaction to being sacked by Leeds.*

J-P Rethacker RIP

FRANCE: *L'Equipe* has lost another link with its European Cup-creating past on the death at 73 of Jean-Philippe Rethacker. Invalided out of a promising playing career at 21, in 1951, Rethacker went straight into a journalist's job with *L'Equipe* and stepped down only on retirement just before the 1994 World Cup.

Reflective...Venables

One other change at *L'Equipe* is the departure of former editor Jerome Burea. He is best remembered outside the paper as the most voluble critic of French national coach Aime Jacquet – right up to the moment when France won the 1998 World Cup.

Rules of engagement

"The executive committee of the Lesotho FA has announced new rules for players who have been called up to the national team. A player should not agree on interviews without permission from one of the 'technical team' members; a player must not steal national team equipment. No weapons in the camp, discipline in terms of respect for everyone, no insults and alcohol. A player should show team spirit. In case of injury, such player should inform his technical team in time. On the other hand, players are also free to report any misconduct on the part of management towards them."
– from Lesotho newspaper Mopheme.

Notes & quotes

"When my great-grandson was born one of the first things I did was telephone Sepp Blatter. I said: 'I have two pieces of news: the first is that I have a great-grandson; the second is that in 50 years' time he will become president of FIFA.'"

Joao Havelange, former FIFA president, has plans to establish a dynasty in Zurich

"The difference between Paolo and me is that I've always had to apply myself a lot, while he has natural talent."

A natural...Maldini

Milan centre-back Alessandro Costacurta pays tribute to team-mate Paolo Maldini following the latter's 500th Serie A game.

"To my mind, the best football in Europe is being played by Arsenal. I can see them in the Champions League Final."

Lothar Matthaus puts the Indian sign on Arsene Wenger.

"We thought we could put on a gala show for our fans, forgetting that victories require work."

Marseille coach Alain Perrin reflects on an embarrassing 3-0 loss at home to arch-rivals Paris Saint-Germain.

The month in pictures

● 19/03/03...Arsenal crash out of the Champions League after losing to Valencia

● 19/03/03...Brian McBride returns to MLS after his stint with Everton

● 20/03/03...John Hartson strikes to send Celtic through to the UEFA Cup semi-finals at the expense of Liverpool

● 22/03/03...In one of the games of the season, Milan beat Juventus 2-1 to stay in the Serie A title race

GLOBAL VIEW
Paul Gardner

Mexico, natural home of the World Cup

TO COMPLY with the notoriously harsh *World Soccer* 'full disclosure' rules, I have to get this off my chest: I am getting older and more crotchety, and I don't travel as well as I used to, and I'm rather fond of Mexican cuisine. There you have it, my personal interest in what follows.

Right. Now to the point. The location of future World Cups. Africa in 2010? Iffy, methinks. Brazil in 2014? Nice idea, but who the hell can think that far ahead?

So I have a modest proposal for FIFA. One that will put an end to all this expensive lobbying, all this politicking and vote-cadging, one that will ensure we have no more shocking scandals *a la* Charlie Dempsey.

Let's try this: a permanent site for all future World Cups. My choice is Mexico. It immediately solves one vital point in future planning: there's no need to worry about a Mexican economic collapse – the USA simply would not allow it.

One of the huge advantages would be that FIFA, along with the local organising committee, will not have to reinvent the wheel every four years. After two consecutive Mexican World Cups everything should go like clockwork. A permanent FIFA World Cup office should be opened in Mexico City. That would be an excellent move anyway, quite aside from the World Cup, for FIFA to operate a bit less closely with the Europeans and the G-14 gang.

Mexico also happens to be just about as central as you can get for the world of soccer – by which I mean Europe, Africa and South America. No one would have to travel too far. Except the Asians and the Australians, but we'll deal with that when they've proved that they deserve all those berths.

The Europeans won't like the idea, but then they don't like anything that happens outside of their continent. At least the afternoon games should fit in with their prime-time TV schedules. Otherwise, they'll just have to get up in the middle of the night. Big deal. Once every four years.

Mexicans are lovely people, too. Soccer mad, soccer knowledgeable, friendly, not given to hooliganism. Sell-out crowds guaranteed, provided FIFA keeps the prices reasonable.

Accommodation? Listen, Mexico is a major tourist destination for millions of Americans. The automatic result of that is that the country is loaded with first-class hotels. What about the don't-drink-the-water scares, the threat to gringo stomachs of Montezuma's Revenge? Oh come on, where's your sense of adventure? Anyway, the pharmaceutical industry has more or less taken care of that problem.

> 'The ideal situation: a soccer-mad country whose fans will drench the event in passion, excitement and colour'

English fans, should England qualify, can expend their energy doing what they call the Mexican Wave. (They might even discover that the Wave is not Mexican at all, but originated in the USA, at college gridiron football games.)

There will be complaints that, as permanent host nation, Mexico will be at a huge advantage. So: Mexico will get no automatic berth, it will have to qualify each time. No problem – CONCACAF gets three and a half spots and it is unthinkable that Mexico will not always claim one of them.

This ensures heightened local interest and legitimises Mexico's presence. But, I hear you complain, the home advantage, what about that? Well, what about it? The beauty of Mexico as permanent host is that it is neither a major soccer power nor an out-and-out minnow. The ideal situation: a huge country with all the resources to stage the event, whose fans will drench the event in passion and excitement and colour (are there any people better than Mexicans at the vivid public use of colour?) – but a country that, even with fanatic support, is unlikely to win it.

(This in-between, almost neutral, position of Mexico has already been used – cynically – by FIFA. In 1988 it caught Mexico age-cheating at a youth tournament and banned the country from the 1990 World Cup. Would Brazil or Germany have been treated so harshly? Mexico was just right – not too small to be insignificant, not big enough that their absence would worry the sponsors.)

And so to what really matters, the purely soccer stuff. Two of the best World Cup tournaments were those of 1970 and 1986, precisely the ones played in Mexico.

The altitude, you see. Far from being a threat, the altitude turns out to be a big help to those teams that want to play real soccer, as opposed to those that just want to charge about all over the place. Energy has to be conserved, skill and intelligence win out over brawn and athleticism.

There you have it. My absolutely unanswerable case for making Mexico the permanent World Cup site. No doubt there will be piffling objections, and they will all, I assure you, come from Europe. Many will come from England. I'll not pay much attention to them – it's only a few months ago that *The Times*, no less, said that "South America" hasn't staged a World Cup since Mexico had it in 1986. For the record, Mexico is part of North America.

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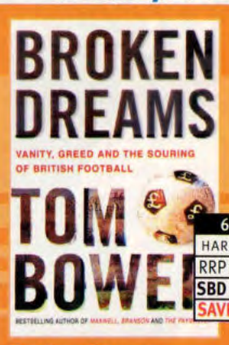

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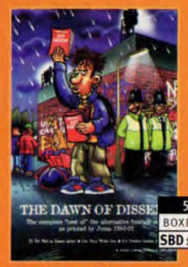

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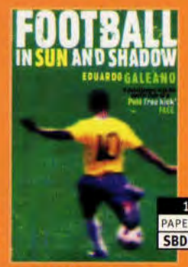

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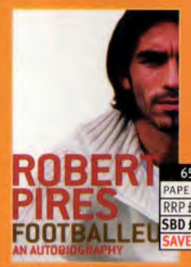

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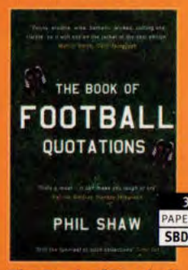

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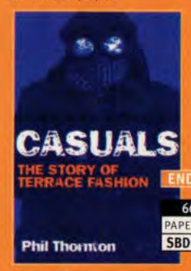

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WSoccMAY03

Burning ambition

A meaner, hungrier, more mature Del Piero has been playing the finest football of his career, says Paddy Agnew

IT IS not often that Juventus have reason to be doubly pleased with a 2-1 away defeat. Yet, Basle's ultimately meaningless, late win against the 'Old Lady' on the last night of the Champions League second phase was greeted with huge satisfaction in the Juventus camp. Not only were they into the quarter-finals but the game also marked the much-welcomed return of Alessandro Del Piero.

It ended a seven-week period on the sidelines, prompted by a badly-pulled thigh muscle picked up during Juve's 1-1 draw with Atalanta in Bergamo on the first Sunday of February, and represented a timely boost for the club as they go into the final stretch of both Champions League and Serie A title races.

When Del Piero limped off against Atalanta, Juventus were third in Serie A, three points behind joint leaders Milan and Internazionale. When he finally returned to domestic action in a 'clash of the Titans' with Milan at the San Siro in late March, Juventus were out in front, three points clear of Inter and eight clear of Milan.

Furthermore, when he was injured, Champions League quarter-final qualification still had to be secured. He returned to a side that had ridden out a crisis prompted by home and away defeats by Manchester United to burst back on to the European stage (and into the last eight) with a gutsy 3-2 home win over Deportivo La Coruna.

Given the form he had been showing before this most recent injury, it is no exaggeration to suggest Del Piero's return could prove to be the key to a highly successful spring for Juventus. For, while it might seem strange to use the adjective 'hungry' about one of the world's most successful and highly-paid footballers, the reality is that Del Piero is a hungry man, determined to set to rights recent spectacular failures on the world stage.

All the signs augur well. For a start, the 28-year-old is a wiser, physically stronger, psychologically more mature player. That physical maturity has much to do with the length of time it took him to recover from the cruciate knee ligament injury incurred in November 1998 (in a Serie A game at Udinese), which effectively put him out of soccer for more than a year.

Physical maturity can be easily explained by factors such as age, experience and recovery from injury. But on the basis of what do we claim that today's Del Piero is more mature, psychologically? Why does he give the impression of once more being able to live up to his daunting artistic nickname of *Il Pinturicchio*, in reference to the Renaissance maestro Bernardino di Betto, best known for his landscape-dominated frescoes?

The answer comes, firstly and obviously, from watching this season's Del Piero in action. His movement off the ball, his vision, his passing, his goalscoring touch and, above all, his desire to win have never looked stronger. So much so that, after the first two months of the season, he had scored 11 of all 22 goals scored by Juventus in Serie A and Champions League games.

Yet, other less obvious signs suggest Del Piero is truly on the way back. For most of his career, he has come across as a reserved, reticent, somewhat closed individual, not always over-enthusiastic about playing the media game and careful with his money. At training, he is always the most difficult 'catch' for the media. When he does choose to speak, his words are usually measured, intelligent and to the point.

Last April, the retiring Del Piero wrongfooted us all when he released a 'photo-biography', called *Simply Del Piero*, that seemed to fly in the face of his own public reticence by showing the private Del Piero at work, at play and in the arms of his live-in girlfriend, Sonia Amoruso. He told *Gazzetta Dello Sport's Sportweek* magazine: "My mania for being reserved and withdrawn has eased a bit, I've become more instinctive, less rigid, especially after what was the most painful episode of all, the sickness and death of my father a year ago. I had all the money in the world to help him get better but I couldn't do anything. It was a devastating shock. What good is it putting away millions and millions if you're not able to save those nearest and dearest to you?"

●'I might seem serious, timid, reserved and respectful, but when I catch fire I can be a real rowdy'

Del Piero does, of course, have "millions and millions" to save. He declared an income of £7.8million in the fiscal year 2001, making him Italy's best-paid footballer ahead of Ronaldo, then of Inter (£5.8m), Gabriel Batistuta, then of Roma (£5.75m), Inter's Christian Vieri (£5m) and Milan's Paolo Maldini (£4.3m).

Money does not always lead down the road to maturity. Yet even as authoritative an observer as Italy team-mate Fabio Cannavaro conceded recently that Del Piero is nothing if not a mature professional. "He is a thoughtful, poised person," said the Inter defender. "What struck me about Ale was the way he handled the difficult period of his injury. He said nothing controversial, kept his thoughts to himself and acted professionally."

Doubtless, the arrival in his life of the lovely Sonia has helped Del Piero, both on and off the field. The release of the *Simply Del Piero* book confirmed a relationship that started nearly four years ago when Del Piero found himself much attracted by the sales assistant in a swanky, downtown Turin designer-label clothes shop.

Such had been Del Piero's typical reserve about the relationship that by the summer of 2000 it was being openly speculated that he might be gay. The couple now live together in a luxurious villa, in the hills outside Turin. "Sonia is part of my life, a very important part," says Del Piero. "She has given me an inner serenity and has helped me in relationships with others.

"It's not always easy to be around me. My family and friends are forced to live among the reverberations of my success, for good and for ill. In my home village [Conegliano, Treviso] people used to say I was like smouldering embers. I might seem serious, timid, reserved and respectful but when I catch fire, when I open up to people I know, then I can be a real rowdy."

Juventus and Italy fans are obviously hoping that Del Piero "catches fire" this spring. And there we come back to his potential hunger. Despite four Serie A titles and a Champions Cup with Juventus, *Il Pinturicchio* considers himself somewhat short-changed on the international front.

With Italy, he has never fully realised his potential on the biggest of all stages, experiencing disappointment at two World Cup finals and one European Championship. Injury stopped him at France 98, while Italy's over-cautious attitude ruined the party in Korea/Japan. In between, 57 times-capped Del Piero suffered his biggest disappointment of all in Italy's last-gasp Euro 2000 Final loss to France. He twice had the chance to wrap things up in the second half, when the Italians were a goal ahead. The defeat, plus dismal flops by Juventus in the last two Champions League campaigns, have left him eager for success.

A Champions League triumph for Juventus, the successful defence of their Serie A title, putting Italy back on the road for Euro 2004 in Portugal, marriage to Sonia (the subject of media speculation) and the renewal of his club contract (due to expire in 2004) are all possible highlights of the next six months in the life and times of Alessandro Del Piero. All good reasons for the boy from the village to get fired up.

The leading contender

Sid Lowe in Madrid on the man who – says the whole of Spain – must be favourite to win the end-of-year player awards

THE reaction was as inevitable as it was familiar. When Raul scored twice to defeat Milan in the Champions League, the Spanish press jumped up and down in righteous indignation, demanding – yet again – that Raul be awarded *France Football* magazine's *Ballon d'Or*.

The Real Madrid striker, they wrote, must at last be named European Footballer of the Year. The match report in Spanish sports daily *AS* prayed that "those who chose the *Ballon d'Or* weren't taking a siesta. Note it down! Please do something!"

The clamour for Raul is overwhelming, a concerted campaign. The media won't rest until Madrid's No 7 is given what's 'rightfully' his. While in England, Michael Owen's 2001 success was greeted with a quiet ripple of applause, in Spain the *Ballon d'Or* is an obsession; Raul's inability to win it, a source of disgust.

Barely a day goes by without someone demanding "justice". The agenda is pushed at every press conference and interview. Whenever someone says Raul deserves the award, the media pointedly echoes the sentiment. If a foreign newspaper praises him, the comments are reproduced under the inevitable headline: "Italy/Germany/France surrenders to Raul."

Meanwhile, praising the competition is proscribed. The whining that accompanied Owen's success was amazing, while the fact that the following year's winner was a Madrid player (Ronaldo) only slightly tempered the indignation. When Ronaldo collected the *Ballon d'Or* at the Bernabeu stadium, Madrid's fans chanted "Raul! Raul! Raul!"

The president of the Spanish federation, Angel Maria Villar, claimed Raul has not won the award because he's Spanish; the media implied that *France Football* – who only count the votes – had something against him; and some moaned that La Liga and/or Real Madrid lacked sufficient media weight or failed to sell themselves like other, 'lesser' competitions and clubs – even though previous winners include Figo, Ronaldo and Rivaldo.

The thing is, they are right. Not about the reasons, but about the man they champion. Even amid Madrid's galactic superstars, there is a powerful case to be made for Raul Gonzalez Blanco to be considered the very best, the greatest player in the world.

His record is simply stunning. He has twice been Spain's *Pichichi* (top marksman), he is the Champions League's all-time leading scorer with 41 goals in 79 games, and he has hit more La Liga goals than any current footballer. He has scored 210 times for Madrid, recently overtaking Hugo Sanchez. Only Ferenc Puskas (242), Santillana (289) and Alfredo Di Stefano (307) lie ahead, and he will surely catch them, just as he broke Spain's international record: Raul's 31 goals in 59 appearances are more than any player in the *seleccion's* history.

The list goes on: Raul has won three European Cups, two World Club Cups and three League titles. He is captain of his national side – the man ex-coach Jose Antonio Camacho charged with "pulling the cart".

> **'When Ronaldo collected the *Ballon d'Or* at the Bernabeu stadium last year, Madrid's fans chanted "Raul! Raul! Raul!"'**

And, most staggeringly of all, Raul is just 25. Yes, 25. With perhaps 10 years left, the sky is the limit. In fact, as Emilio Butragueno put it, there is no limit. No wonder Madrid sporting director Jorge Valdano, who gave the 17-year-old Raul his debut in October 1994, commented: "One day the *Guinness Book of Records* will have to dedicate him an entire chapter."

It is perhaps because Raul is so consistent that he is not as highly-rated outside Spain as he deserves and has never won the *Ballon d'Or*. He has not exploded on to the scene and he rarely excels himself; he just carries on at the same, breakneck pace.

Besides, only one man can win each award – and while Raul has been superb for eight years, there's always someone who has shone as much in a given season. (The difference is that Raul does it every single year.) Even this time, though the Spanish press won't admit it, there are challengers – like Thierry Henry, Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Christian Vieri.

Raul has also never stirred the market with a big-money move, he has yet to dominate an international tournament (injury cut short his World Cup), and he isn't a 'face': he lacks the grinning charm of Ronaldo, the boyish looks of Owen or the iconic style of David Beckham.

In fact, he seems unfriendly, aloof. It's an impression that has been exaggerated, but Raul's personality is hardly that of a superstar: one-on-one he is friendly, honest and softly spoken – but he is timid. He doesn't self-publicise, he's unexciting in press conferences and he doesn't make grandiose gestures.

Henry recently admitted that he "can't understand how Raul has never won the *Ballon d'Or*. He doesn't grab the attention, but it's what he does on the pitch that should matter."

Quite. But Raul is only a brilliant footballer, and even the way he plays goes against him. His idol is Roberto Baggio, but their styles are worlds apart. Raul is not superstar material, he doesn't stand out. He's not spectacular, lightning quick or powerful, and he can't dribble an entire defence – or, rather, he wouldn't even try.

It's difficult to say what exactly it is that makes Raul so brilliant, except perhaps his astonishing ability to scoop up impossible chips, leaving goalkeepers looking stupid. Raul must wear boots like a court jester.

But Raul has no weaknesses. None. As Madrid captain Fernando Hierro puts it: "Raul may not be a 10/10 in anything, but he's a nine in absolutely everything."

Including attitude and application. Raul is a superb all-rounder who works exceptionally hard and never gives in; not exactly qualities that win awards, but precisely the characteristics Madrid need and, oddly, traits that have made him even more popular in Spain – his scrambled strike against Borussia Dortmund in a recent Champions League game was hailed as "the least galactic goal ever, but better for it".

Raul never lets Madrid down; he is always in the right place when they really need him. He has a burning desire to win, is utterly focused and has total confidence. Valdano tells the story of the day he promoted Raul. "I told him: 'I'd like to play you, but I'm worried you'll get nervous.' Raul said: 'If you want to win, put me in; if not, choose someone else.'

"There are people who are men even when they're kids. Raul is one of them," Valdano adds.

But while such qualities may not earn Raul glitzy awards – something Hierro describes as "unbelievable" – those within the Spanish game have no doubt as to his value. Ask any manager or player, from Aragones to Zidane, which footballer they rate most highly, and the answer is always the same.

It's time the rest of Europe awoke from its siesta and took note.

Henry: eighth wonder of the world

Keir Radnedge on the Arsenal forward who continues to dazzle and delight at Highbury

NEVER mind Ronaldo or Zinedine Zidane; Arsene Wenger thought Thierry Henry should have been crowned European Footballer of the Year last December.

Whereas that may have seemed odd, considering his disastrous World Cup – sent off against Uruguay, eliminated in the first round – the recommendation demonstrates exactly how highly Arsenal's manager values the attacking talents of his fellow countryman.

The irony of Wenger's plaudits, coming on top of Arsenal's Henry-inspired opening gallop in the Premiership, was that the player had never thought of himself as a centre-forward until the day he arrived in north London in 1999.

Henry says: "I remember the very first day and people laughing when Arsene Wenger said he was going to use me to lead the attack. I was pretty dubious myself. I looked at him with my eyes wide open in surprise.

"But, as in so many other things, he was right. He knew what I could do – and I didn't. Now every match I play with the intention of rewarding him for everything he's taught me. It was Wenger who launched me on a professional career at Monaco and it is Wenger who has rebuilt my career at Arsenal and held my hand when things weren't going so well."

The Highbury faithful deserve some of the credit as well. Henry cannot praise English fans enough, saying: "Here they realise sometimes you can lose – against anyone. They really understand a game. If a player runs 50 yards and then puts his cross behind goal they'll applaud the initial effort. If I meet fans in the street they don't yell or throw themselves on me. They respect me as a human being. It's very different to Italy or Spain. That's why London is such a terrific place to live."

So much for Juventus and Real Madrid, who had complicated his life in the career-building years after Monaco had taken the initial chance on the coltish teenager from the Parisian working-class suburb of Les Ulis back in 1994.

Monaco discovered Henry after hearing reports of how he had scored six goals in a local league match. He joined the club on youth terms during the Wenger era, though he was brought into the first-team squad by successor Jean Tigana. He made his League debut against Nice at the end of August 1994, two weeks after his 17th birthday, playing on the flank.

Subsequently, Tigana, recognising a remarkable talent that needed careful nurturing, rarely started with Henry – preferring to bring him into the action early in the second half "when the opposition are beginning to tire and his pace is an even more dangerous weapon".

Henry was voted France's Young Footballer of the Year in 1996 and, dazzled by all the attention, signed a pre-contract with Real Madrid. The Spanish club had used a non-FIFA agent, however, and Monaco took advantage. They complained to the world federation and, while the issue was frozen, persuaded Henry to sign his first full-time professional contract with them in January 1997.

'I was dubious when Wenger said he wanted me to lead the attack, but he knew what I could do'

The rewards were immediate. Monaco won the French League and Henry's nine goals in 36 games earned him selection for the national juniors, who reached the quarter-finals of the Under-20 World Youth Cup in Malaysia. The following October he made his senior debut under Aime Jacquet against South Africa at Lens.

Henry's goals helped Monaco to the 1997-98 Champions League semi-finals, and he then played in six of France's seven World Cup games, scoring three first-round goals – one against South Africa and the two against Saudi Arabia. Jacquet, harbouring doubts about Henry's strength and stamina, left him on the bench for the Final victory over Brazil. But others had no such qualms. Arsenal came in for Henry, thought they had a deal but were blown out when Monaco – amid the World Cup ecstasy – doubled the price.

Instead, the following January, he went to Italy. The Monaco experience had turned sour. Tigana had been ousted and Henry, having tasted the big-crowd excitement of a World Cup, was frustrated at turning out in "mini matches" for his club. So, to most people's surprise, he signed a four-and-a-half-year deal with Juventus.

He should have been an ideal partner for Filippo Inzaghi but it did not work out that way. Juventus finished a poor seventh, brought in a new coach in Carlo Ancelotti and decided on a fresh start. Henry was as disillusioned as the club. He said: "I was played wide out on the left of a five-man midfield. I was running up and down a channel between defence and attack. It wasn't my game and it wore me down."

The entertainer...Henry goes for the spectacular against Ajax in the Champions League

At last, Henry got his delayed wish and moved to Arsenal – his "dream" club – for £8 million. Wenger had already decided Henry's pace would make him a fearfully effective centre-forward against slow-turning Premiership defences, but Henry took a lot more convincing. He says: "I scored two goals in my first nine games but I missed so many chances Patrick Vieira was teasing me. They weren't difficult chances, either, but I just couldn't get a shot on target.

"About November I decided to ask the boss to be put back on the wing. But when I arrived at the training ground I thought: 'No, it's all right. I'll keep trying.' I had confidence in Arsene so I decided to wait until the end of the season.

"It was a mental thing because I was at the World Cup as a winger and all the people in Europe knew me as a winger. Of course, by the end of the season it was all OK."

Henry's fortunes turned against Derby at Highbury on November 28. He says: "We were losing 1-0 and then I scored two goals, and they were what you might call striker's goals. From that moment I turned the corner."

Arsenal were Premiership runners-up and Henry finished their top League scorer with 17 goals in 26 starts. It may not have been mere coincidence, either, that halfway through the season he found a home of his own and no longer had to live in a hotel. Initially, he had been wary of settling, but the fan culture helped. He says: "In Italy even if you miss just one goal and even if you are Gabriel Batistuta, they want to kill you, so to speak. But here, even when I used to miss, they were still singing my name."

The Highbury dressing-room provided an education, too. Henry says: "In training they were tough because they wanted to show me the way of the Premiership. They didn't kick me too hard but it taught me how to withstand the physical pressure if I wanted to keep the ball.

"Above all, I owe it all to Arsene Wenger. I've known him since I was 16 or 17. He's a great human being. He has put his touch on this club. What he has done is amazing."

In 2000-01 Henry scored 17 goals in 27 games as Arsenal finished League runners-up, and last term was the Premiership's top marksman with 24 in 31 games as the Gunners won the title.

Wenger says: "I was concerned when Thierry didn't show any signs of being a success in the centre. But he is intelligent and learned quickly. Really, he should have been European Footballer of the Year. Well, another time, I'm sure."

The learning curve

Ajax's Swedish striker talks to Gavin Hamilton about his team's surprise progress in the Champions League

NO DOUBT about it: Ajax have been the surprise team in this season's Champions League. After three years away from Europe's leading club competition, few expected the Dutch champions to reach the quarter-finals at the expense of other, wealthier sides such as Arsenal and Roma.

The irony is not lost on Ajax's Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic. "We've surprised everybody, including ourselves," he says. "At the start of the season, we were just happy to be playing in the Champions League; now we've made it to the quarter-finals. Nobody expected it; it's fantastic."

Ibrahimovic, known universally as Zlatan, has been the top scorer in an Ajax team which, although admired for their one-touch football, have acquired a discipline and sense of purpose under coach Ronald Koeman that had been lacking in previous campaigns.

"We've been enjoying our football this season," says Zlatan. "You have to remember that in the Dutch League, Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord are on another level from the other teams. A lot of Dutch teams win all the time in the Dutch competitions but then don't show anything in Europe. But we have shown also that we can do it in Europe."

Zlatan dismisses the charge that the current Ajax side lack the attacking verve of previous generations. "We are a traditional Ajax team," he insists. "We play good football, one-touch football. We have traditions and we have always played like that."

Nor should the role of Koeman in Ajax's progress this season be under-estimated. "He has made us better as a team and as individual players," says Zlatan. "He has given us confidence and the opportunity to play his style of football."

It was the chance to develop as a footballer with Ajax that first attracted Zlatan to move to Amsterdam from Malmo, then of the Swedish Second Division, in summer 2001. "It wasn't my plan to move to Holland, but when I heard from contacts that Ajax were interested, I was like 'Yeah, of course!' It's a perfect place for a young player to come."

Though still a teenager, Zlatan arrived in Amsterdam with something of a 'history', having already clashed with Malmo team-mates in training and felt the strong arm of the law following an incident in Malmo's red-light district.

He remains a fiery character – according to the official UEFA figures, he has been the dirtiest player in this season's Champions League, committing 38 fouls – but his footballing progress this term is undeniable.

Koeman must take much of the credit for harnessing Zlatan's talent to the benefit of the team, who are reaping the rewards of his application on the training field. As club captain Cristian Chivu acknowledges: "Ibrahimovic works like a slave – he knows that raw talent will only take you so far and that you need to really sweat, every day, to make the most of it. He knows that plenty of talented players have fallen by the wayside."

The contrasting fortunes of Zlatan and Egyptian team-mate Mido are a case in point. While the equally talented Mido has been packed off on loan to Spain's Celta Vigo after a series of bust-ups with Koeman, Zlatan has cemented his place as Ajax's first-choice striker. He says: "I feel I have developed a lot and I am still getting better."

'I like technical football. I'm comfortable with the ball at my feet. And that's how Ajax play'

Despite his height (1.96m), Zlatan is comfortable with the ball being played to feet. He acknowledges that "not every player can play at Ajax. Ajax have a traditional way of playing, and for some players it's difficult to fit in. You learn a lot from the Ajax system and it's difficult to move from another team and get used to it. But I like technical football. I'm comfortable with the ball at my feet. And that's the way Ajax play."

Zlatan, whose father is Bosnian and mother Croatian ("they met in Sweden long before the war"), fits comfortably into the cosmopolitan set-up at Ajax. He is one of a number of foreign youngsters in the Ajax first team – Chivu, Steven Pienaar, Maxwell, Petri Pasanen – who have blended in alongside products of the club's youth system such as Rafael Van der Vaart and Andy Van der Meyde.

Zlatan says: "Chivu, for me, is the best defender in the world. And we have lots of other great players, you know – Rafael [Van der Vaart], Maxwell, the Brazilian. But we are also good as a team."

Although a commitment to youth has long been a tradition at Ajax, so, unfortunately, has the tendency for the club's best players to depart. Zlatan acknowledges that the likes of Chivu and Van der Vaart are coveted by clubs in wealthier leagues. "That's always a worry," he says. "But we need to keep this team together. I hope we can stay together as we can do great things together."

Zlatan's own position is more straightforward. Despite reported interest from Roma and Tottenham, he wants to stay in Amsterdam. "I am happy at Ajax. I have a contract until 2006 and I want to see it out. As I said, Ajax is a great place for a young player to develop and I am still young. I am happy at the club."

He strikes a note of caution when asked about the Champions League quarter-final against Milan. "We have to watch out. Milan are better than Inter, who we played in the first group phase. We will have to concentrate and be on our guard."

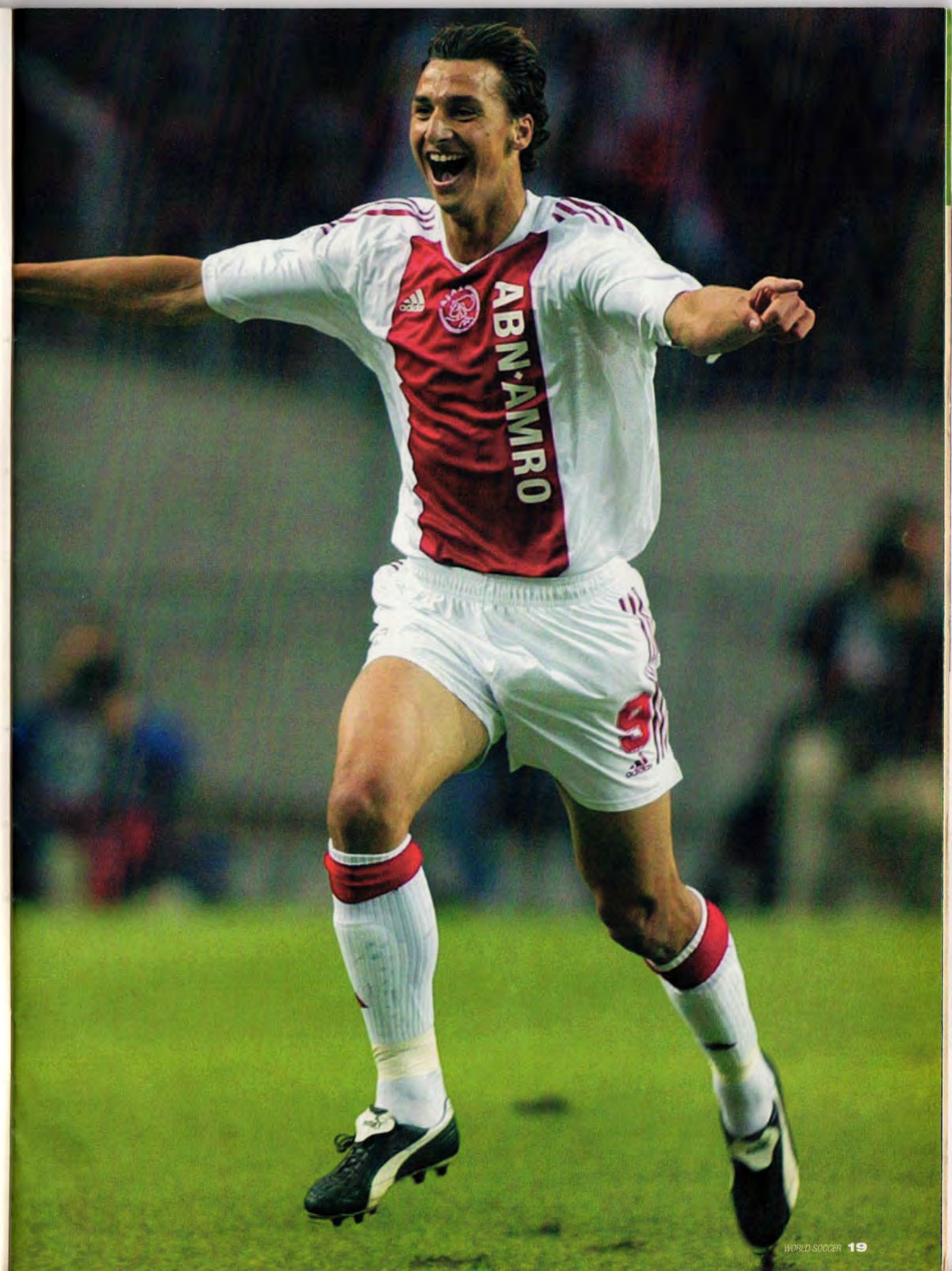
Real Madrid remain the team to beat, though. "They have been the best team," he says. "The funny thing is that if you look at Ajax, we have maybe 15 top players who can play in the Champions League. But if you look at Real Madrid, they have 30 top players!"

Zlatan, though still only 21, is never short of an opinion on other teams. He feels Arsenal, who Ajax pipped to a quarter-final berth from the second phase group, are "a good team, but you have to be good in every game in the Champions League, and they did not manage that." But Arsenal striker Thierry Henry would still be his choice as player of the year. "He has scored some brilliant goals and shown what a good player he is."

Not that other opposition has been more forgiving. Zlatan says: "In the Champions League, every opponent is tough, it is on another level from the Dutch League.

"It's been a tough season, playing so many games. The travelling, the games, the training – it takes something out of you, not just physically, but also mentally."

But it should come as no surprise that Zlatan Ibrahimovic looks like coming through with flying colours.



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Grand design...Paris Saint-Germain rejected the imposing Stade de France to remain at their Parc des Princes home

One-horse town

Nick Bidwell on Paris Saint-Germain and the challenge facing Luis Fernandez's successor

PARIS may be rare among major European cities in that it can apparently sustain only one major club, Paris Saint-Germain. But it is no footballing outpost.

PSG declined to move into the magnificent Stade de France after the 1998 World Cup finals, opting to stay at the more intimate Parc des Princes. But they are rarely far from the headlines.

However, the Parc is going to be a much duller place in the absence of boisterous coach Luis Fernandez, who will be turning on his heel and bidding PSG adieu at the end of his contract in June.

No question that French sports journalists will miss the larger-than-life Fernandez. Whether it be his touchline histrionics, clashes with referees, bust-ups with his own chairmen and star players, and ever forthright views, the 1984 European Championship-winning France midfielder was guaranteed hot copy, a headline-writer's dream.

Ironically, Fernandez announced his imminent departure just three days after PSG's best performance of the season, an emphatic 3-0 win at arch-rivals Marseille. Yet even though it was the Parisians' first victory at the Stade Velodrome in 15 years, Fernandez knew only too well that the game was up, that since replacing the sacked Philippe Bergeroo in January 2000 he had globally failed in his mission to restore PSG to their former lustre.

If Fernandez's first spell as Paris Saint-Germain coach was a blockbuster, featuring victory in the 1996 European Cup-winners Cup Final, Fernandez the Return was very much B-movie quality. He might have been given the benefit of the doubt when an inconsistent PSG narrowly missed out on Champions League qualification last season, but with them struggling even for a UEFA Cup berth this term, his detractors' knives were soon to be sharpened.

> 'I was given a Ferrari without any petrol and made the mistake of thinking I could win a Grand Prix by pushing it'
>
> *PSG coach Luis Fernandez*

A dressing-room of pro and anti-Fernandez factions, more poor results and strained relations with chairman Laurent Perpere all contrived to wear the coach down. The final straw probably came when PSG's hardcore fans at the Auteuil and Boulogne ends of the Parc des Princes began to turn on him. In his days as an all-action star for PSG in the 1980s and as their successful coach, Fernandez was venerated; now it was cat-calls and banners calling for him to go.

"I have to recognise I have failed," Fernandez told *Le Parisien* newspaper. "For the good of the club, it's better I leave. This situation is my responsibility. I made mistakes in the job. As both coach and manager I wanted to look after all sporting matters, and perhaps I took on too much. I lost a sense of perspective. I wrongly believed I could succeed alone. I was blinded by my love of the club."

A capital city club with grand designs, Paris Saint-Germain have always loved to recruit big names – Dominique Rocheteau, Dominique Bathenay, Osvaldo Ardiles, Youri Djorkaeff, George Weah are just a few. But the massaging of superstar egos has never been a Fernandez forte. Heated exchanges with David Ginola and Nicolas Anelka led to them flying the nest, and it has been the same old story of mutual antipathy with the current headliner, Brazilian midfielder Ronaldinho.

After issuing a "Fernandez or me" threat, Ronaldinho will no doubt be pleased that he has prevailed, though how much longer he remains in PSG colours is a matter of debate, courted as he is by the likes of Internazionale, Arsenal and Manchester United.

For Fernandez, the financial woes of the club's paymasters, Canal Plus, are at the heart of the PSG malaise. It is hard to disagree. With the TV company losing £203 million last year and their parent company, media group Vivendi Universal, some £10 billion in the red, these are worrying times. It is hardly surprising Canal Plus are anxious to offload PSG; unfortunately, no one has been tempted.

"This club has been bled dry," says Fernandez. "You can have the best coach in the world, he can work 24 hours a day, but it's impossible to keep up with the best in Europe. I was given a Ferrari without any petrol and I made the mistake of thinking I could win a Grand Prix by pushing it. I forgot that without money you can't do anything."

Fiscal difficulties, mismanagement and scandal have long been the cross Parisian football has had to bear. PSG were bailed out by Canal Plus in 1991 after amassing huge debts; the club's former president, couturier Daniel Hechter, came to a sticky end in 1978 after revelations of a ticket-selling scam designed to fund under-the-counter payments to players; and other one-time First Division clubs such as Racing Paris, Red Star, Paris FC and Stade Francais all fell on hard times and slipped into the part-time ranks.

While the Parisian region may not produce nearly as many professional players as the Mediterranean coast, the capital and its environs have a fine track record for nurturing talent. Passion for the game is not lacking. Racing Club, Stade Francais and Red Star, all traditional and popular clubs, slumped because they were badly run.

It is now 13 years since Paris last had a First Division derby – PSG versus Racing in 1989-90 – and, truth to tell, another is not on the horizon. Paris is a one-horse soccer town, where the sheriff is PSG.

Paris – The Clubs

Creteil

Creteil (blue) have benefited from a neighbourhood merger

To be found in the south-eastern suburbs, they are the only Parisian representatives in the Second Division. Made much progress under the stewardship of former Bordeaux president and optician chain magnate Alain Afflelou (1996-2002) and merged last summer with Lusitanos of St Maur, a nearby Fourth Division club mainly staffed by Portuguese immigrants. The current side has a strong English League flavour, featuring ex-Watford defenders Ramon Vega and Patrick Blondeau, and former Norwich City striker Marc Libbra.

Racing Club

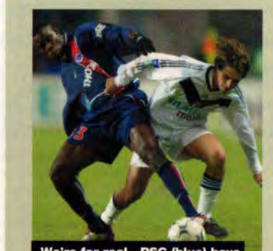
French champions in 1936, the sky blue-and-white hoops of Racing were a famous sight throughout the 1930s and 40s, when the club drew substantial crowds to their Colombes home in the north-west reaches of the capital. Abandoned professionalism in 1966 but were revived in the 1980s when the Matra industrial group pumped in the funds to regain top-flight status. However, the spending spree proved futile. Matra's backing ended, they were relegated in 1990 and went part-time again. Demoted to the Fourth Division last summer for lack of financial guarantees.

Red Star

Formed in 1897 by Jules Rimet, their glory days were in the 1920s when they won four Cups. They were last in the First Division in 1975. At one point Red Star were candidates to take up residency at Stade de France, only to go cold on the idea. Understandably, they regarded rent of £7.3m a year as exorbitant. Now in the Fifth Division.

Paris Saint-Germain

PSG first saw the light of day in 1973 following the fusion of Paris Football Club and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and won promotion to the top flight within a year. Backing from Paris City Hall and latterly the Canal Plus TV organisation has turned them into major players on the French and continental scene. Claims they are an artificial club watched by showbiz stars, politicians and media types no longer hold water. For many years now, working-class youth from the capital's suburbs have identified with them and supporter groups such as the Boulogne Boys, Gavroches and Supras are as passionate as any in Europe, though it has to be said that there is a strong hooligan element among them.



We're for real...PSG (blue) have lost their 'artificial club' image

Sannois-Saint Gratien

Fourth Division side who have made amazing strides of late, putting together five straight promotion campaigns. Founded in 1988 when two clubs from the Val d'Oise region just north of Paris decided to join forces.

Viry-Chatillon

Based in the southern suburbs near Orly airport, they are currently fighting relegation from the Third Division. Enjoyed their finest hour when reaching the second tier in 1982, although they remained there for only one season.

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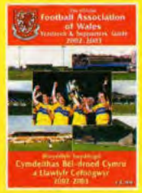

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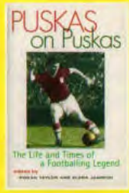

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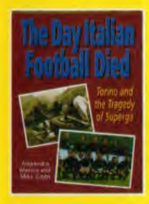

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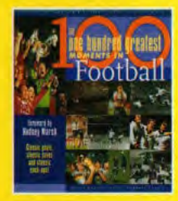

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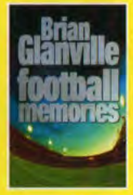

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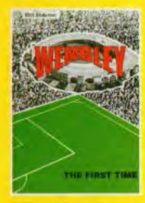

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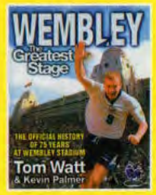

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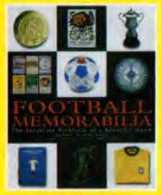

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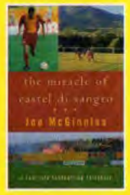

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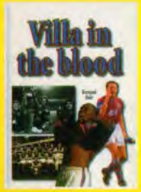

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Other side of the coin...a burned-out bus on a Rio street epitomises Brazil's social and infrastructure problems

It's Brazil in 2014!

Brian Homewood reports on a *fait accompli* as South America gets next in line to stage the World Cup

BRAZIL appear set to host the 2014 World Cup unopposed after FIFA gave South America the tournament under its rotation system and the continent's federations promptly backed the five-times champions as their only candidate.

Brazilian federation president Ricardo Teixeira believed that the deal was signed, sealed and done after a two-hour meeting with his counterparts at the South American confederation (CONMEBOL) headquarters in Asuncion.

"If South America are the hosts, then it's fixed," he said, just about managing a smile, after CONMEBOL president Nicolas Leoz confirmed his member federations had unanimously backed the Brazilian bid.

There had been talk of other candidates but they never really got going. Chile, which staged the 1962 tournament, had pondered launching a joint bid with Argentina, where memories of South America's last World Cup in 1978 were soured by the brutal military government which ruled the country at the time. But the idea collapsed amid Argentinian indifference.

There had also been talk of an ambitious Andean World Cup involving Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Bolivia. But talks made as much progress as a condor with a fear of heights. Peruvian federation president Manuel Burga said: "We had a few meetings to test the water but at the end only three countries [Peru, Ecuador and Colombia] were left, and we decided to throw our weight behind Brazil."

> 'If South America are the hosts, then it's fixed'
>
> *Brazilian federation president Ricardo Teixeira*

So is Brazil up to the job?

As most football supporters know, there are two sides to Brazilian football. On the playing and technical side, Brazil is well ahead even of the most advanced European nations. The administrative side, on the other hand, is a disaster. Brazil's attempt to host the 2006 World Cup ended in humiliation when the federation (CBF) pulled out days before the final vote in Zurich, while Pele was so disillusioned with the federation that he refused to support the bid.

And if FIFA does stick with its decision, then the organisation of the 2014 World Cup will be in the hands of a federation that only two years ago was one of the main targets of a government probe into suspected mismanagement and corruption in Brazilian soccer. Congress's damning, 1,600-page report accused 16 leading club and federation directors – including Teixeira – of a variety of financial crimes, including tax evasion, fraudulent foreign exchange operations and the pocketing of federation or club funds.

Yet Teixeira, helped no doubt by Brazil's victory in Japan and South Korea, has survived all this and come out stronger than ever. Already at the helm for 14 years, he has not discounted carrying on until 2014. "The future belongs to God," he said.

The CBF has proved it can do things in a professional, efficient manner when it wants. Brazil's 2002 World Cup coach Luiz Felipe Scolari – never afraid to speak his mind – had only kind words for its support in his preparations for the finals campaign. And there were no complaints about the manner in which the country hosted the World Club Championship in 2000.

Even on the domestic front, which usually brings out the worst in Brazil's directors, there are signs sanity is being brought to the game. For the first time in its 32-year history, the national championship will take place over nine months rather than the usual five and be decided on a conventional league basis (see page 66).

As for infrastructure, Brazil boasts dozens of stadiums of more than 60,000 capacity, although many are in an appalling state and would need huge reforms to bring them up to scratch.

Hotels also remain a question mark. Although they are often better than their equivalents in Europe and North America, there are just not enough to cope with the army of fans and media who would descend on the country.

Then there is public transport. Urban transport consists mainly of fume-belching buses, complemented by token metro systems in cities such as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo; the country's huge size and lack of railways mean that air travel is the only viable way to cover long distances.

Basically, all these matters are more a question of political will than anything else – although the inevitable debate will rage for years over the merits of spending money on the World Cup in the midst of so much poverty, social injustice and crime.

"This is a serious problem," admitted Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira. "In places such as Rio, you could almost say we are living in a non-declared war."

But perhaps the biggest dampener could be Brazilian public apathy to anything that does not involve their own country. During the World Club Championship, most matchdays involved double bills of games in the same stadium. Vasco da Gama played Manchester United at a full-house Maracana but by the time South Melbourne and Necaxa came out for the second game half an hour later, the giant arena was deserted.

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Keir Radnedge
COMMENTARY

Payback time

Europeans must repay South American generosity – but how, where and when?

SOMEWHERE down the line, there must be a pay-off. Quite where or how or when I am not sure. The options are open. Just keep your eyes and ears open over the next few weeks.

I am not talking anything as grubby as financial bribes. I am merely talking fair political play, though this may be a contradiction in terms.

Consider the international calendar. Just when the entire project was teetering on the brink, FIFA settled international dates right through to 2006.

The 10 nations of CONMEBOL, the South American confederation, have made two significant contributions. One is an agreement not to call up Europe-based players for non-European friendlies for the next two years. The other is to stage the Copa America every four years, in line with the European Championship, rather than the present biennial arrangement.

Such generous gestures. FIFA and UEFA are surely under an obligation to respond in kind. But how?

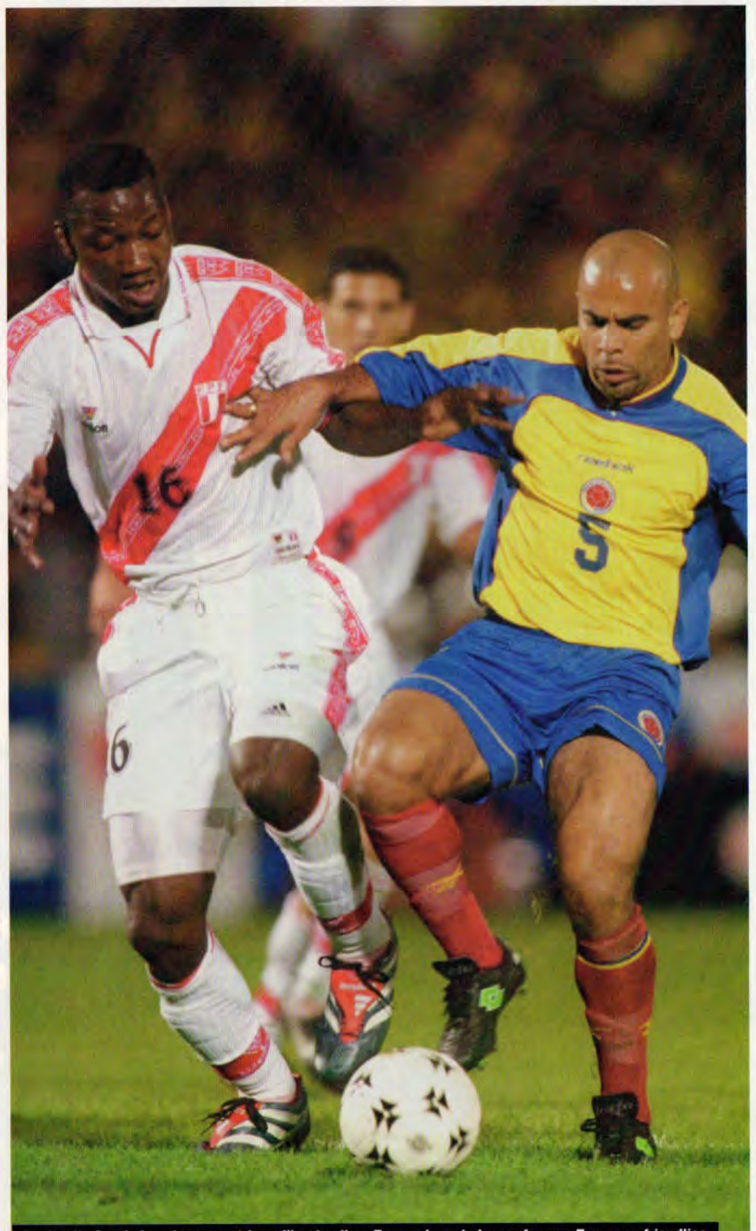
By coincidence, there is one way. CONMEBOL, upset at losing one of its guaranteed places at the World Cup finals, has asked FIFA to expand the 2006 tournament from 32 nations to 36. That would open the gates of Germany to one more nation from South America and Africa/Asia, and two more from Europe. UEFA is split. I believe president Lennart Johansson, who is also president of FIFA's World Cup organising committee, is opposed to further expansion of the World Cup.

With his World Cup hat on, he is concerned about further diluting the quality and prompting accusations of overworking already fatigued players; but, with his UEFA hat on, he knows very different pressures have split his executive.

Johansson says: "There are pros and cons. I have not yet seen an official response from the German organisers but I assume they will say it is feasible. There are complications, however, concerning contracts such as television, so we will be having intensive discussions ahead of the FIFA executive meeting on May 3. UEFA is not completely united. Some people say there must be a limit at some time. You can't go on adding teams. But I can't predict the outcome. It's a very clever proposal from the South Americans: no losers, only winners.

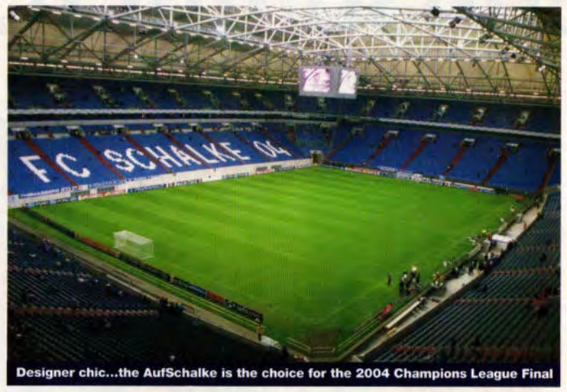
"If we said no right away we would be criticised from within our membership for turning down the opportunity to bring two more European teams to the World Cup finals."

South America, of course, wants only what is fair. I would be surprised if they do not get their way.



Trade off...South American countries will not call on Europe-based players for non-European friendlies

Schalke: small is beautiful



Designer chic...the AufSchalke is the choice for the 2004 Champions League Final

THE Champions League may be expanding in importance but that does not mean much when it comes to accommodating the fans of its most successful teams. That much became apparent when UEFA chose one of the smallest venues in the competition's history to host the 2004 Final.

The honour has been bestowed upon the new AufSchalke stadium in Gelsenkirchen, in the heart of the industrial Ruhr. The stadium is one of the venues for the 2006 World Cup yet its official capacity is 'only' 52,500. Removing seating for extra officials, sponsors, media and low-level places below the advert hoarding level means maybe fewer than 48,000 'real' fans can get in.

That puts Schalke below even Hampden Park, Glasgow, which hosted last year's clash in which Real Madrid beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-1. Certainly it does not compare with grander venues such as Milan, soon-to-be-redundant Munich and Saint-Denis or even this year's choice of Old Trafford, Manchester.

Yet oddly, next year will be only the sixth German hosting of the Final since the launch of the tournament in 1955. The previous five were twice in Stuttgart and three times in Munich. The last German hosting was in 1997 when Borussia Dortmund beat Juventus 3-1 in the Olympic stadium.

Newcastle United's St James' Park, Sunderland's Stadium of Light and Hampden Park were all passed over for next year's UEFA Cup Final. That goes to the Ullevi in Gothenburg, the fifth time it has held a European club final.

Next season, incidentally, should be the last time the UEFA Cup is played under the traditional knockout format. At long last UEFA will confirm in July the introduction of a mini-league system.

The reason Atlantic League-style proposals have been revived lately is because Champions League fringe clubs such as Celtic and Rangers, Anderlecht and Club Brugge, FC Porto and Benfica have grown restive over UEFA's failure to introduce some sort of budgetary safety net. UEFA must, finally, head them off at the pass.

"We must take a decision in July. We cannot delay any longer," said UEFA president Lennart Johansson.

On guard...Eusebio's statue at the Luz

Lights go out on Estadio da Luz

BENFICA'S Estadio da Luz, opened in 1954, shut for good after their 1-0 Portuguese League win over Santa Clara on March 22. The noted landmark for anyone flying in to Lisbon is being demolished to make way for a new ground nearby which will host next year's European Championship Final.

The Luz, named after a suburb, staged two European club finals: the 1983 UEFA Cup return between Benfica and Anderlecht, and the 1992 Werder Bremen-Monaco Cup-winners Cup clash. It also claimed to be the largest stadium in Europe after 135,000 saw the 1991 World Youth Cup Final, in which Portugal beat Brazil.

Blatter caught out by TV time delay

SEPP BLATTER was betrayed by a BBC television programme narrated by Alan Hansen about the club v country conflict.

Blatter described England's 'two teams' approach to the friendly against Australia as "a farce" and promised to obtain preventative action from the International Board.

The interview was recorded a while ago. But the programme was broadcast a couple of weeks after that International Board meeting in Belfast. Oddly, the issue of substitutes in internationals does not appear to have been mentioned.

Aigner: successor search starts here

GERHARD AIGNER threw European football politicians into turmoil when he sprang on them his decision to retire in December.

Aigner, 60, wants to spend more time with his young family and, no doubt, 33 years with UEFA may feel like several lifetimes.

Only president Lennart Johansson and a couple of other close confidants within the European body knew what was coming before his chief executive spoke up at the executive meeting in Rome.

Stepping down...Aigner

The timing is awkward, no question. Johansson hopes to have a successor lined up by mid-summer, but Aigner's steady hand on the tiller would have been valued through to next year's European Championship finals.

Johansson says: "I have worked with Mr Aigner for 12 years. We have had some fights, of course, but I think our co-operation has been excellent. One thing I have learned is that he thinks issues through and then, once he has made his decision, will not be moved.

"So there was no point trying to persuade him to stay even just a little longer."

The political ripples could spread a long way. It was Aigner who persuaded Johansson to stand again as president last year to halt a putative campaign to parachute in Michel Platini as president. As it was, Platini, a long-time associate of FIFA president Sepp Blatter, was not only voted on to the executive but also secured one of UEFA's places on the FIFA executive.

Aigner's departure will abandon Johansson to being an increasingly distant executive. This may not be good for UEFA. though it could work positively for relations with FIFA.

Who will succeed Aigner? Inevitably the name of Michel Zen-Ruffinen, sacked general secretary of FIFA, will be mentioned. He possesses 'the knowledge' plus a lot of outside respect and the necessary facility with languages. But he would be a step backwards in football politics. UEFA will no doubt set up a selection committee but the decision will be taken by Johansson.

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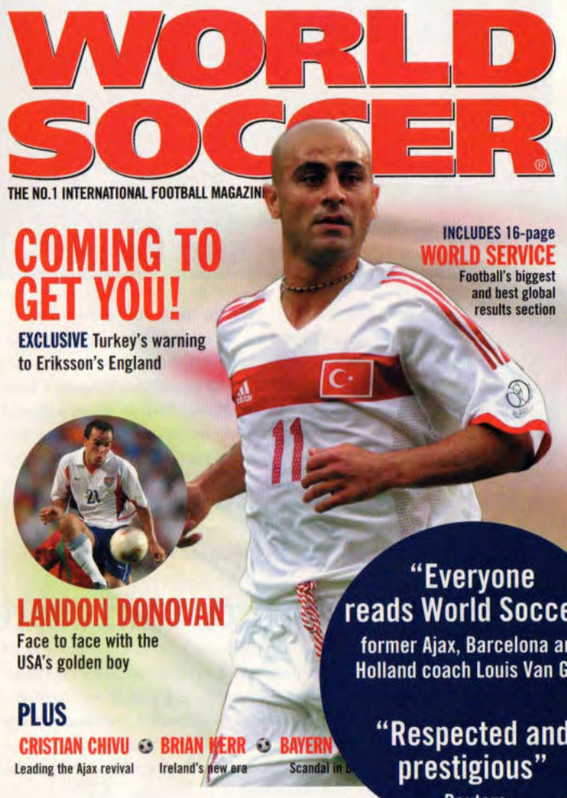

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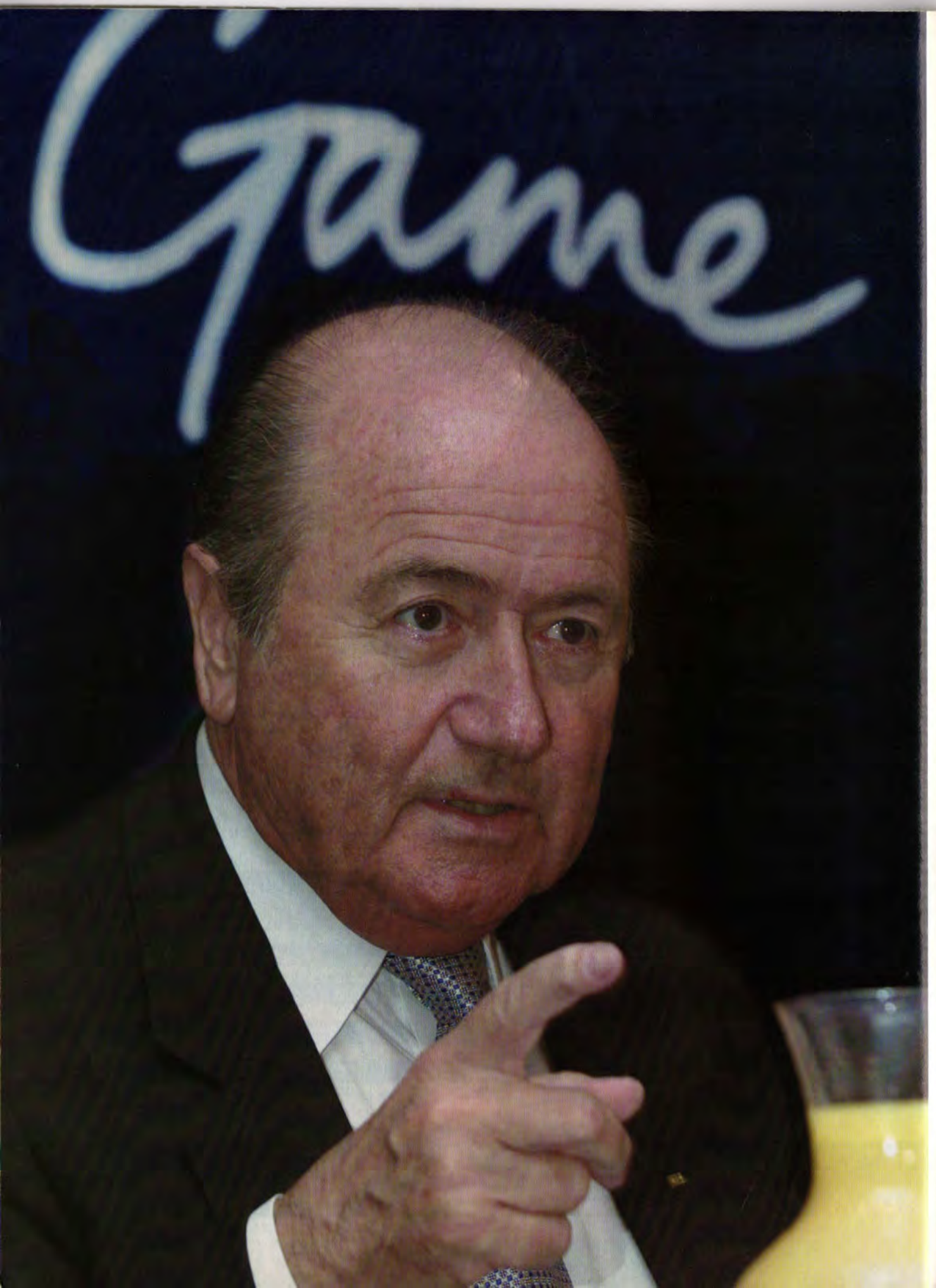


Blatter in the hot seat

FIFA president Sepp Blatter tackled a number of subjects during a recent meeting in London. Gavin Hamilton was there for *World Soccer*

WORLD SOCCER: How does the outbreak of war in the Middle East affect football?
SEPP BLATTER: We have already taken one decision, to postpone the World Youth Under-20 Championship [in the United Arab Emirates], which was due to kick off on March 25. We hoped the war could be avoided, but it's not in the power or prerogatives of FIFA. Football should not be abandoned. We shall go on playing everywhere in the world where it is possible to show a strong message of better understanding.

There was a suggestion the Under-20s could be moved to another country. Japan was mentioned. Will it now take place in the autumn in the UAE?
When it's clear what will happen in this region we have, together with the UAE football federation, to decide if it could be played in October or at the beginning of November, because you cannot play in the summer there, it is too hot. But we shall play this tournament this year, if not in the UAE, then somewhere else, but not in Asia. Then, the 2005 competition would come back automatically to the United Arab Emirates. But we have to play because the players will be a year older next year.

What is FIFA's financial situation?
The ISL bankruptcy, for us, is definitely closed. Even though the bankruptcy procedure is not yet closed, we have an agreement with the administrators that we are out of it. Therefore, we expect to have lost 17million Swiss francs [£7.8m] directly from the ISL case. But at the end of last year we had no debts. We had a deficit of 3m Swiss francs [£1.4m]. We will have a press conference on April 15 when we will present our four-year accounts, which will be properly audited. We are working on a four-year cycle, 1999-2003, so it was a nonsense to say last year we had these huge debts as some newspapers reported, and that we should go to the judge and say that we are going out of business. We are not rich, but we have no debts.

What is the state of play for FIFA's television rights beyond 2006?
We have our own marketing company and the decision has just been taken to handle the marketing rights ourselves. A definite decision has not been taken on television projections, but the step forward is that we will retain the system we have had in the past. We will work closer with our licensees on the different markets because we are convinced – you could say we are very optimistic – that the World Cup still has more to earn in the TV market, especially when you add the so-called new media rights. We would hope to gather the new media rights with the television rights. The final decision on this will take place later this year so we can properly start our bidding processes for the 2010 World Cup and probably also for 2014.

On the subject of 2010, what is the situation regarding co-hosting?
There is no co-hosting foreseen in the FIFA statutes and regulations. As regards the African bids, Nigeria has bid as an individual association and member of FIFA. Now Nigeria wants to include these other countries – Cameroon, Ghana, Benin, Togo. They can just forget about it. They are not bidders, they are not on the papers. Nobody from the Nigerian FA has ever approached FIFA to develop such an idea. We learned about it through the media. It's not possible. It's the World Cup, it's a serious organisation.

How do you feel about calls from organisations such as G-14 for FIFA and UEFA to pay player salaries during the World Cup and national associations to pay while on international duty?
G-14 is a so-called organisation in football but it would be nonsense not to listen to what it has to say even though it is not officially recognised. There are some national associations, especially in Europe, who already pay the clubs for putting players at their disposal for national team duty, such as France, Switzerland and Germany. Naturally, this amount is never the same level as the player's wages. But if you ask the national associations of less-famous countries, say Sierra Leone or Togo, to pay a player's wages for international duty, they cannot do it.

On the other hand, we have to say that national team players in a club enhance the quality and the price of such players because they have international exposure, especially when it comes to the World Cup. And concerning the World Cup, FIFA pays such a large amount of money to the national associations. Last year we distributed 302m Swiss francs [£139m] to the 64 countries – sorry 32, not 64 yet!, I'm joking – in order to pay the players. That became the argument of G-14 and of the clubs, but it's not for us [to do it all the time]. But during the World Cup the players are at the disposal of international duties. It's also a question of solidarity and understanding among the football family.

Are we going to see more problems over the release of players for international duty?
There are FIFA regulations and if the clubs do not release the players and the national associations ask us to intervene, then we intervene. So far we have been able to solve practically all the problems with the exception of one – the case of Anelka.

The international co-ordinated calendar only started to be implemented last year. We have had very few problems. You will see in 2003 and 2004 that there will be less and less of these problems. In Africa, it has been difficult with two competitions in parallel and it is not possible to release all the same players every second week. So now they will be using the qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup as qualifiers for the Cup of Nations as well. So here we are in a situation where these problems will be avoided. The South Americans will play the qualifiers for the 2006 World Cup in a group of 10, so there will be 18 matches to play, but they will use some dates for double headers and they have committed themselves when they are playing friendly matches outside Europe to not call up European-based players. We have agreed that they will only take the players available in South America. So we will avoid the problems we had when Brazil went to play in China [in February].

Concerning the international calendar, you have to realise that if you use all the dates available to play club competitions, then all of a sudden you have no more dates, you have too much football and too much football on television. UEFA has now reduced the Champions League by taking away the second stage of group games. But in the leagues playing with 20 teams it means 38 league matches, then playing League Cups, playing FA Cups and some of these playing home and away, as in Spain and Italy. Where do you have the time for the players to relax? Where do you have time for the spectators to relax also? There is too much football nowadays. We do not need to intervene by making decisions to stop or to cut. It is the market [that will do it] because professional football is subject to the law of supply and demand.

But are the clubs as committed to the calendar as federations? There are still leagues with 20 teams.
Yes, but Spain had a league of 22 teams only two or three years ago. You say they are not committed to the international calendar, but there are enough dates available even if you play 38 league matches. Now we have problems with the Confederations Cup to be played in France in June. The clubs say they will not release the players because the players must have holidays. But look at the travel arrangements of big teams in Europe, of the Premier League. They are going to play in California, to Asia. All of a sudden they have time ▶

to go there because they want to make money. So therefore we ask for a minimum of respect, too.

But how does FIFA change the clubs' attitudes?
It's very difficult to change them but we have to get the national associations to take responsibility, because they are responsible. Something must be done. I spoke with the former Liverpool player Alan Hansen, who said that everybody is waiting for FIFA to take a lead because in England they cannot expect someone in the organisation of English football to have the power or courage to see it through. That is why I brought this again to the attention of the executive committee, and we will work on it.

Why is FIFA so reluctant to sign up to the new world anti-doping code?
We were reluctant about one principle and we were right to be reluctant. You cannot take somebody who is found guilty of doping and ban him for two years. You have to give him the chance to defend himself. No court in Europe would sustain a decision which is arbitrarily taken for two years. Concerning WADA [World Anti-Doping Agency], we signed a memorandum of understanding with them in Copenhagen in December. The WADA president, Mr Pound, and the IOC [International Olympic Committee] president are happy. Those who are not happy are those who expected FIFA would come and not sign because we don't want to fight doping. But we fight doping.

You need to tell the players that because it hasn't stopped them.
I can tell a player, but a player will listen more to a team doctor or a colleague. So we have carried out non-announced controls during training sessions. In football, what matters most is not what we call the dopes, it is recreational drugs.

Why is there disagreement between FIFA and the English FA on the punishment resulting from red cards?
We have discussed this problem in the International Board and I came to the conclusion we should have a second look. As long as the decision of the referee is not changed, because a referee's decision is final, we should think twice about amending our regulations that say a player is suspended automatically for one match. So I said I will pass it to the committee for legal matters and come back in May on this matter.

What's your position on video technology? Should FIFA be moving with the times?
So far, with all the research made on goal-line technology, we have not yet found a solution which is rational, practicable and which can be applied. Different companies are working on that, one of the universities in England is still working on this system, but it is very complicated. What we don't want is to have cameras to decide whether it is offside, if a foul has occurred inside the penalty box or outside. That is left to the discretion of the referee and his two assistants. There was also a proposal to the International Board, which in the end was not discussed, to have goal-line assistants, people sitting or standing on the line. But I believe that if three men, and one additional fourth official – give him some additional duties as secretary or whatever – are not able to control the game, then we have to start from scratch and not try to put more officials around the pitch. This was also the opinion of the International Board.

For the Confederations Cup, officials will be wired up. Is FIFA now saying that there is a place for technology on the pitch?
No comment! Seriously, we have decided that it will be not only an experiment, but that it will carry on. So far we have the link between the referee and his assistants, who have a button in their flags to alert the referee. There were experiments in France with microphones so that the three officials can communicate. These worked well and will feature in the Confederations Cup. As far as goal-line technology is concerned, this subject is not new – we discussed it in the International Board six years ago. It went through several different meetings but we would like to have a solution.

The German FA has indicated that it could handle 36 teams at the 2006 World Cup. Could that happen?
Not everything that is feasible or rational happens. But if you asked the organisers in Germany and they said: 'No, we could not manage 36,' then people would say: 'How the hell can you manage 32?' So they have said they can manage. Franz Beckenbauer, in the presence of cameras and media, would not say no, even if he was convinced, but he's not convinced he should go to 36. I believe we should analyse the situation but not only on the feasibility – on logistics, finances, contracts, and on the aspect of quality.

Is the idea of a World Cup every two years dead?
As long as human beings are alive, they have had ideas. Ideas are never dead. But with this idea, I have provoked such a discussion that we now have the international co-ordinated calendar. But we have also realised with the World Cup being played every four years, it is such a wonderful product because it is rare and it is attractive and everybody looks forward to it. So for the time being, let this idea sleep in peace. But it's not dead.

The World Cup will be in Europe next, then Africa, South America. What's the position with Oceania. Are they next?
On one of the lists which has been circulated and accepted by everybody, Oceania will be linked with Asia. They would also have the right to bid [for 2018], together with Asia.

Has any progress been made with the attempts to specify a minimum number of home-based players in club teams?
Yes, we are progressing. Six plus five – it means clubs should always field six home-based players or players eligible for the national team. This is also strongly held by the players' union. We are already discussing this issue with Brussels. Now we are on the way to being mentioned in the same breath as culture. Not as a protocol but as an article with specification for sport. If we get that, it will be easier for us to work on such items which are fundamentally against Brussels law, European law, because so far footballers are just considered as workers and not as artists.

In Africa, there have been serious allegations about age-cheating in youth competitions. What can be done?
This is only a problem in the Under-17 category. We can do nothing. FIFA must trust the political authorities of the country. We ask them when they enter a competition to provide not only a passport, but also a player's birth certificate. So the passport is issued by the authorities of that country, and we cannot prove it is not. How can we do it? We cannot put the country into question.

What about medical tests?
Now in Asia, they have started doing X-rays. But there also is a humanitarian movement saying you cannot use X-rays unless the subject consents to it and if it is for medical reasons. And it is also said that with the results, you can only get within a range of two years. It is not easy, it is an ongoing problem. I know myself, from private declarations of some coaches, who have said that if they don't take these over-age players, they have no chance. In the last Under-17 championship in Trinidad & Tobago, we heard from a German coach working in the region that the youngest player in the Under-17 squad for one of the teams was 20.

Why are you still keen on a World Club Championship when a lot of clubs don't want it?
The Toyota Cup [World Club Cup, played between the champions of Europe and South America] has been played since 1959. But in the meantime, club football has also developed around the world. Therefore the clubs from other continents should also be invited to participate. But as that is not possible in the Toyota Cup, let's have a club world championship. The executive committee took the decision in March last year. ■

> 'The idea of a World Cup every two years should be left to sleep peacefully for now – but it's not dead'

FOOTBALL'S BIGGEST & MOST RESPECTED RESULTS SECTION
WORLDSERVICE

Zidane...six votes in the monthly ESM poll

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH MARCH 2003

Ronald Waterreus (PSV, 2 votes); Daniel Van Buyten (Marseille, 3), Paolo Maldini (Milan, 3), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid, 5); Patrick Vieira (Arsenal, 4), Raul (Real Madrid, 3), Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid, 6), Pavel Nedved (Juventus, 5); Alan Shearer (Newcastle, 5), Ronaldo (Real Madrid, 3), Mateja Kezman (PSV, 3)

HOW THEY VOTED

ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES

A BOLA (POR)
Ricardo (Boavista); Paulo Ferreira (FC Porto), Van Buyten (Marseille), N Kovac (Bayern Munich), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Pires (Arsenal), Beckham (Manchester United), Derlei (FC Porto); Raul (Real Madrid), Larsson (Celtic), Vieri (Internazionale)

DON BALON (SPA)
Waterreus (PSV); Tudor (Juventus), Van Buyten (Marseille), Chivu (Ajax); Manu (Malaga), Deco (FC Porto), Rothen (Monaco), Nedved (Juventus); Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United), Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Ronaldinho (PSG)

FANATIK (TUR)
Barthez (Manchester United); Cordoba (Internazionale), Chivu (Ajax), Ronaldo (Besiktas); Giuly (Monaco), Deco (FC Porto), Vieira (Arsenal), Nedved (Juventus), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Shearer (Newcastle), Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United)

FOOT (BLG)
Kahn (Bayern Munich); Lauren (Arsenal), Van Buyten (Marseille), Maldini (Milan); Nedved (Juventus), Zidane (Real Madrid), Ronaldinho (PSG), Buffel (Feyenoord); Kezman (PSV), Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Van Hooijdonk (Feyenoord)

GAZZETTA DELLO SPORT (ITA)
Cudicini (Chelsea); Miguel (Benfica), Ferrara (Juventus), Ivan Helguera (Real Madrid), Barry (Aston Villa); Vieira (Arsenal), Marquez (Monaco), Davids (Juventus), Zidane (Real Madrid); Shearer (Newcastle), Kezman (PSV)

KICKER (GER)
De Sanctis (Udinese); Stam (Lazio), Worns (Borussia Dortmund), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Beckham (Manchester United), Pienaar (Ajax), Zidane (Real Madrid), Nedved (Juventus); Shearer (Newcastle), Van Nistelrooy (Manchester United), Raul (Real Madrid)

SPORT EXPRESS (RUS)
Casillas (Real Madrid); Metzelder (Borussia Dortmund), Woodgate (Newcastle), Maldini (Milan), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Frings (Borussia Dortmund), Vieira (Arsenal), Zidane (Real Madrid), Nedved (Juventus); Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Koller (Borussia Dortmund)

VOETBAL INTERNATIONAL (HOL)
Waterreus (PSV); Sagnol (Bayern Munich), Ferrara (Juventus), Cordoba (Internazionale); Vieira (Arsenal), Makelele (Real Madrid), Marcelinho (Hertha Berlin), Zidane (Real Madrid); Kezman (PSV), Van Hooijdonk (Feyenoord), Shearer (Newcastle)

WORLD SOCCER (UK)
Dida (Milan); Michel Salgado (Real Madrid), Thuram (Juventus), Maldini (Milan), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Ronaldinho (PSG), Zidane (Real Madrid), Dyer (Newcastle); Raul (Real Madrid), Saviola (Barcelona), Shearer (Newcastle)

Madrid avoid all-Spanish clash

'Holders Madrid followed Milan through from Group C after getting their star-studded act together in the last two rounds'

REAL MADRID'S players were all delighted with their Champions League quarter-final draw with Manchester United – because they did not want to meet Spanish opposition at this stage.

Whether that relief is well-founded remains to be seen after the last-eight stage, which features most of the second phase group favourites. The one exception are Arsenal, who failed to make it through from **Group B**.

Manager Arsene Wenger's men blundered significantly when they failed to beat Roma at Highbury on the penultimate matchday. Patrick Vieira headed Arsenal in front on 12 minutes, and his side should have punished the Italians after the first-half expulsion of Francesco Totti after a clash with Martin Keown. Instead, the Gunners allowed Antonio Cassano to sneak an equaliser just before half-time. Roma might even have won had they been sharper on the break in the second half when they used veteran full-back Cafu's pace to dangerous purpose.

The group's other game also ended all-square at 1-1 with Ajax held at home by Valencia. The Dutch group leaders fell behind to a Kily Gonzalez penalty after 28 minutes, only for Finnish defender Petri Pasanen to level just short of the hour.

Those results left all four clubs still within reach of the quarter-finals but with Ajax and Arsenal in the poll positions. Ajax duly held on to top spot despite being held 1-1 at home by Roma – Andy Van der Meyde's first-minute goal being wiped out by yet another equaliser from Cassano. In Spain, however, Valencia repeated their feat of two years ago by eliminating Arsenal – this time with a 2-1 win. Norway striker John Carew did the damage, scoring either side of Thierry Henry's 49th-minute consolation.

Closing interest in **Group A**, with erratic Barcelona already qualified, centred on who would get second place. That remained wide open after the fifth matchday when Internazionale and Newcastle shared a thrilling 2-2 draw at the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza.

Alan Shearer, who had scored a hat-trick against Bayer Leverkusen earlier in the group, struck from close range three minutes before half-time. Inter levelled straight after the restart through Christian Vieri's header – his first Champions League goal of term – but Shearer restored the visitors' advantage after a mistake by keeper Francesco Toldo three minutes later. Ivan Cordoba's header on the hour completed the scoring to leave Inter teetering one point above Sir Bobby Robson's men.

Barcelona, despite resting several key players, then won 2-0 in Newcastle after second-half goals from Patrick Kluivert and Thiago Motta. Inter, seriously weakened by injuries, could thus have afforded to lose in Leverkusen and still qualify. In fact, they won 2-0 after goals from 18-year-old Nigerian Obafemi Martins and Turkey's Emre Belozoglu. Leverkusen ended the group with six defeats.

Holders Madrid followed already-qualified Milan through from **Group C** after getting their star-studded act together in the last two rounds. Raul became the first man to reach 40 Champions League goals with a 12th-minute strike for Madrid and grabbed No 41 in the second half of the 3-1 home win over Milan. The Italians, for whom Fernando Redondo was making an emotional return to the Bernabeu, pulled one back through Rivaldo before Guti, substituting for Ronaldo, restored Madrid's two-goal advantage.

Borussia Dortmund thrashed Lokomotiv Moscow 3-0 on strikes from Torsten Frings, Jan Koller and Marcio Amoroso. That meant Matthias Sammer's side knew that, to reach the last eight, they had to win in Milan and hope Madrid lost in Moscow.

Madrid's superior technique triumphed over the sandy beach of a pitch in the Russian capital, with Ronaldo heading the winner on 35 minutes. Lokomotiv had chances, notably when Vadim Evseev's close-range header from a corner bounced down and then up over the bar. The Russians faded away in the second half and Madrid duly seized second place in the group.

Dortmund did, indeed, win in Milan with a late but vain strike from Koller after 80 minutes.

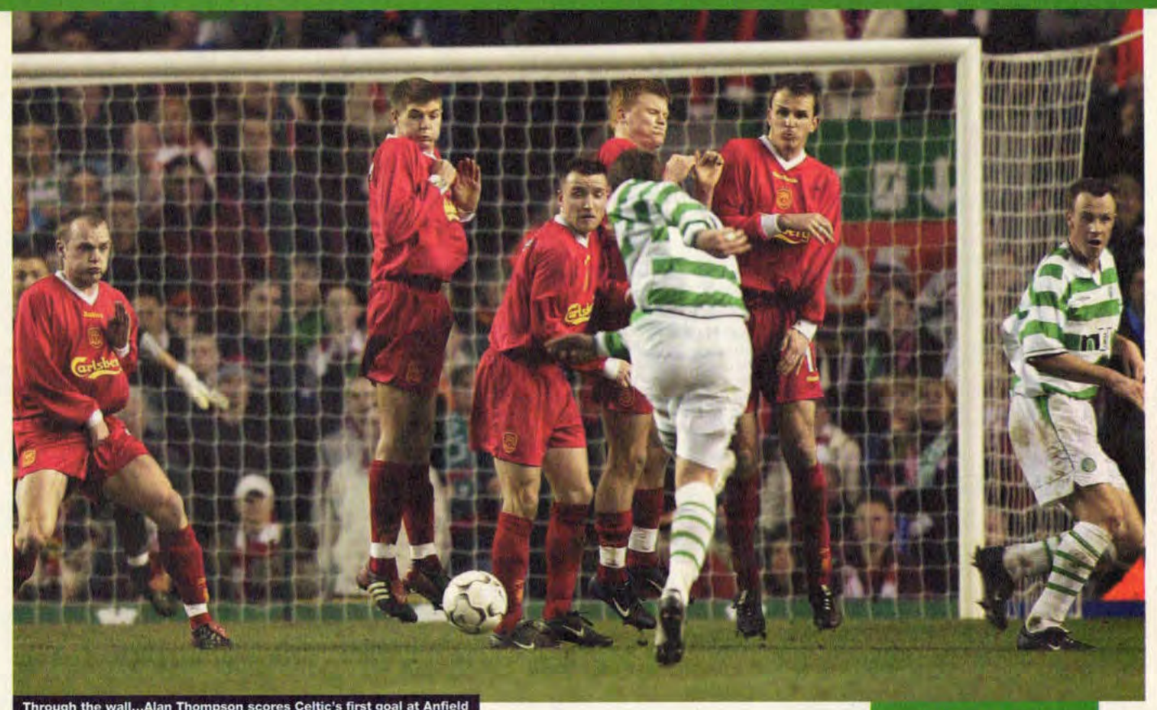
In **Group D**, Manchester United, like Milan, went into their last two matches secure in the knowledge of qualification. They could thus afford to only draw at home to Basle, 1-1, Gary Neville and Christian Gimenez scoring at Old Trafford. Similarly, a 2-0 defeat in La Coruna with a team of reserves meant nothing in a dead last match against Deportivo, who owed their victory to a strike from Victor and a Mark Lynch own goal.

The odd rules of the Champions League meant that, although Juventus, Basle and Depor all finished level on seven points, the Italians progressed by having collected most points in matches between the three sides. First, they had won 3-2 at home to Depor thanks to an injury-time strike from substitute Igor Tudor. In a topsy-turvy game, Juventus had taken an early lead through Ciro Ferrara, then gone behind to goals from Diego Tristan and Roy Makaay – the latter's ninth of the competition. Edgar Davids set up David Trezeguet for a 63rd-minute equaliser and then Tudor struck in the third minute of overtime.

Juventus qualified by ensuring they did not lose by four goals to Basle in their last game. At least the Swiss and coach Christian Gross had the satisfaction of wrapping up a bright campaign with a 2-1 win. Alessio Tacchinardi scored first for Juve after 10 minutes with Basle responding through Mario Cantaluppi (37) and Gimenez (90).

Keir Radnedge

Edged out...Ivan Helguera (left) and Casillas foil Lokomotiv in Moscow



Through the wall...Alan Thompson scores Celtic's first goal at Anfield

UEFA CUP

A new name on the Cup in 2003

A NEW name is certain to be etched on the UEFA Cup after the final whistle at the Estadio Olimpico in Seville on May 21. However, only one of the semi-finalists, Portugal's Boavista, have not won one or another European trophy at some time.

Of course, the last time Celtic won a European trophy was back in 1967 when the legendary Lisbon Lions defeated Internazionale in the Champions Cup Final.

Manager Martin O'Neill's men earned their first semi-final date in 29 years – with Boavista – by defeating Liverpool in the so-called 'Battle of Britain'. Celtic wasted no time in the home leg with John Hartson hitting the bar inside 15 seconds and Henrik Larsson putting them ahead minutes later.

Liverpool thought they had secured a significant advantage when Emile Heskey struck a 17th-minute away goal, but O'Neill was far from intimidated. He said: "Now we have to go to Anfield to win, but why not? We'll certainly go for it."

O'Neill's players were as good as his word a week later when Liverpool were missing El Hadji Diouf through suspension after he spat at two Celtic fans towards the end of the first leg. Celtic dealt better with the raised tension, however.

Liverpool, who should have been buoyed by their League Cup victory, failed to create the expected clear-cut chances, and Celtic seized their opportunity. Midfielder Alan Thompson drove a free-kick low beneath the Liverpool wall in the 45th minute and Hartson fired a security second in the 82nd minute.

"My players were immense," said O'Neill. "What a great feeling – to come here and beat Liverpool on their own turf." Liverpool's Gerard Houllier thought "the first goal came at the worst time for us and was probably the turning point".

Boavista qualified to face Celtic by turning around their tie against Malaga after losing the first leg 1-0 to a 17th-minute goal in Spain from the veteran Panamanian Julio Cesar Dely Valdes. "Not conceding a goal was very important," said Malaga coach Joaquin Peiro.

Not important enough, however. Seven minutes from the end of the second leg Brazilian midfielder Luiz Claudio drove home an equalising free-kick for Boavista which took the tie on to extra-time and then a penalty shoot-out.

Boavista keeper Ricardo then emerged as the Portuguese hero by scoring one kick himself and saving two others.

The 'other' Inzaghi – Simone – played a key role for Lazio in defeating Turkey's Besiktas. Coach Roberto Mancini sent on Pippo's brother as a 50th-minute substitute in the first leg in Rome and he snatched the winning goal minutes later.

"The second leg remains wide open," said Besiktas coach Mircea Lucescu. Not for long. Lazio struck twice in the first 10 minutes in Istanbul through Stefano Fiore and Argentinian Lucas Castroman. Besiktas emerged with only the consolation of a late strike from Sergen Yalcin.

'My players were immense. What a great feeling – to come to Anfield and beat Liverpool on their own turf'

– Celtic manager Martin O'Neill

"They gave us a lot of space early on and we made the most of it," said Mancini.

Lazio thus secured a semi-final against FC Porto. The former European champions and current Portuguese League leaders fought back impressively after losing their quarter-final first leg 1-0 at home to the Greeks of Panathinaikos. Poland's World Cup striker Emmanuel Olisadebe condemned Porto to their first home defeat of the season in all competitions with 18 minutes remaining.

But coach Sergio Markarian's delight turned to disappointment when Porto turned the tables in Athens. Two goals from Derlei – the first after 16 minutes and the winner in the 13th minute of extra-time – earned narrow victory for the weary Portuguese. "I was always confident," said Porto coach Jose Mourinho. "I know just how deep our quality goes."

Celtic and Porto are at home in the semi-finals first legs on April 10 (returns on April 24) after the Porto-Lazio match was turned around by UEFA to prevent both second legs taking place in Oporto on the same night.

Keir Radnedge

INTERNATIONALS

Wednesday, March 5

Mar 5 - Sudan - friendly
Sudan 1
DR Congo 3
HT: 1-1

Friday, March 7

Mar 7 - Benin - friendly
Benin 1
Niger 1
Benin 3-1 on pens

Sunday, March 9

Mar 9 - Gaborone - friendly
Botswana 0
Lesotho 1 (Mpakanyane 13)
HT: 0-1

Mar 9 - Kinshasa - friendly
DR Congo 3
Congo 0
HT: 2-0

Tuesday, March 11

Mar 11 - Havana - friendly
Cuba 0
Jamaica 0
Cuba: Reve - Ruiz, Rivero, Fernandez, Pedro, Ramirez, Marquez, Cabre, Reyes, Galindo, More.
Jamaica: Ricketts - Neil, Dixon, Goodison, C Davis, Brissett, Whitmore, Dawkins, Taylor, J Williams, Deerr.

Wednesday, March 12

Mar 12 - Arusha - friendly
Tanzania 0
Uganda 0

Thursday, March 13

Mar 13 - Havana - friendly
Cuba 1 (Galindo 43)
Jamaica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Hernandez (Cub)
Cuba: Reve - Ruiz, Rivero, Estrada (Cervantes 67), Pedro, Ramirez, Marquez, Cabre, J C Reyes, Galindo, Tridez.
Jamaica: A Lawrence - Neil, Dixon, Stewart, Dunn, Taylor (D Williams 75), Whitmore, C Davis, Deerr (Hinds 75), Nelson (Brissett 80), Dawkins (J Williams 75). *Sent off: Hinds 89min.*

Friday, March 14

Mar 14 - Martinique - Tournoi de Cinquantenaire semi
Martinique 2 (Percin, Reyal)
French Guyana 1 (Cosset)

Saturday, March 15

Mar 15 - Martinique - Tournoi de Cinquantenaire 3-pl
Guadeloupe 2
French Guyana 2
Guadeloupe 5-3 on pens

Mar 15 - Kenya - friendly
Kenya 2
Uganda 2
HT: 1-0

Mar 15 - Rwanda - friendly
Rwanda 4
Burundi 2

Sunday, March 16

Mar 16 - Lesotho - friendly
Lesotho 2
DR Congo 2

Mar 16 - Windhoek - COSAFA Castle Cup, 1st rnd
Namibia 0
Botswana 1 (Molwantwa)
HT: 0-1

Mar 16 - Zimbabwe - friendly
Zimbabwe 0
Malawi 0

Wednesday, March 19

Mar 19 - Egypt - friendly
Egypt 6
Qatar 0
HT: 4-0

Mar 19 - Dallas, USA - friendly
Mexico 2 (Pardo 27, Olalde 72)
Bolivia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Terry (USA)
Mexico: Rios - Castro (Altamirano 46), Carmona, D Davino, Briseno, Valdez, L Perez (Arce 69), Pardo, R Morales (Patino 46), Borgetti, Bravo (Olalde 46).
Bolivia: H Suarez - Escalante, Arana, Raldes, Nay (Vaca 46), Rojas, Alvarez, R Gutierrez (C Suarez 79), Bengolea (Mujica 46), J A Castillo, Roger Suarez.

Mar 19 - Swaziland - friendly
Swaziland 1
Lesotho 0
HT: 0-0

Saturday, March 22

Mar 22 - Kenya - friendly
Kenya 4
Tanzania 0
HT: 2-0

Mar 22 - Maputo - COSAFA Castle Cup, 1st rnd
Mozambique 0
Lesotho 0
Mozambique 5-4 on pens

Mar 22 - Rwanda - friendly
Rwanda 1
Zambia 1
HT: 1-1

Sunday, March 23

Mar 23 - Benin - friendly
Benin 2
Equatorial Guinea 1

Mar 23 - Kingston - friendly
Jamaica 2 (Taylor 20, Daley 78)
Barbados 1 (Cox 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Bowen (Cay)
Jamaica: Ricketts - C Davis, Dixon, Neil, Thomas, Stewart (Daley 63), Chin-Sue (Dawkins 86), Whitmore, Hue (J Williams 75), A Williams (Nicholas 65), Taylor (Nelson 75).
Barbados: Chase - Sobers, R Burrowes, Cox, S Hall (Defreitas 72), K Hall (Neblett 84), Goodridge, Lucas, Parris, Riley (W Burrowes 84), Straker.

Monday, March 24

Mar 24 - Rwanda - friendly
Rwanda 0
Zambia 3
HT: 0-2

Wednesday, March 26

Mar 26 - Graz - friendly
Austria 2 (Schopp 52, Haas 81)
Greece 2 (Tsartas 48, Kafes 51)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 8,500. **Ref:** Ovrebo (Nor)
Austria: Mandl - Scharner, Ehmann (Hieblinger 57), Stranzl, Pogatetz, Schopp, Aufhauser, Flogel (Wagner 73), Weissenberger (Ivanschitz 46), Kollmann (Haas 64), Herzog (Kovacevic 90).
Greece: Nikopolidis (Chalkias 46) - Seitaridis, Konstantinidis, Dabizas (Kyrgiakos 46), Fissas (Venetidis 46), Lakis (Giannakopoulos 46), Zagorakis (Kafes 46), Tsartas (Amanatidis 69), Karagounis (Georgiadis 69), Haristeas (Nikolaidis 46), Vryzas.

Mar 26 - Burundi - friendly
Burundi 0
Burkina Faso 0

Mar 26 - Ethiopia - friendly
Ethiopia 3
Benin 0

Mar 26 - San Diego, USA - friendly
Mexico 1 (Patino 72)
Paraguay 1 (Cardozo 73)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Kennedy (USA)
Mexico: Rios - Carmona (Lopez 77), Marquez, D Davino, Briseno (Castro 62), L Perez (Juan P Rodriguez 68), Pardo, Valdez, Bravo (Olalde 66), Borgetti, R Morales (Patino 66).
Paraguay: Villar - Martinez, Da Silva, Maldonado, Caniza, A Ortiz, Bonet, Britez (Cabanas 71), V Ortiz (Sanabria 86), Cardozo, Santa Cruz.

ASIAN CUP 2004 QUALIFIERS

PRELIMINARY ROUND

Group A

In Maldives

Mar 21
Maldives 1 (Umar 42)
Brunei 1 (Faldin 89)
HT: 1-0

Mar 23
Myanmar 5
Brunei 0
HT: 3-0

Mar 25
Maldives 0
Myanmar 2 (Win Htike 52, Zaw Zaw 65)
HT: 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Myanmar	2	2	0	0	7	0	6
Maldives	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Brunei	2	0	1	1	1	6	1

Group B

In Sri Lanka

Mar 21
East Timor 2 (Steinwall og 2, Cabral 81)
Sri Lanka 3 (Jayasuriya 35, 89, Channa 43)
HT: 1-2

Mar 23
Taiwan 3
East Timor 0
HT: 2-0

Mar 25
Sri Lanka 2 (Kumara 13, Channa 78)
Taiwan 1 (Yen C W 47)
HT: 1-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sri Lanka	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Taiwan	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
East Timor	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

Group C

In Nepal

Mar 16
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Gulov 60)
Afghanistan 2 (Shah 26, Azami 70)
HT: 0-1

Mar 18
Nepal 4 (N Rayamajhi 35, 87, Khadka 39, Lama 90)
Afghanistan 0
HT: 2-0

Mar 20
Nepal 0
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Nikov 27, 47)
HT: 0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nepal	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Kyrgyzstan	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Afghanistan	2	1	0	1	2	5	3

Group D

In Hong Kong

Mar 25
Hong Kong 5 (Chan Chi-hong 17, 35, Kwok Yue-hung 47, Au Wai-lun pen 59, 82)
Laos 1 (Visay 66)
HT: 2-0

Mar 27
Laos 2 (Kholadeth 30, Visay 37)
Bangladesh 1 (Ariful 90)
HT: 2-0

Mar 30
Bangladesh 2 (Feroj, Monwar Hossen)
Hong Kong 2 (Au Wai-lun pen, Szeto Man-chun)
HT: 0-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hong Kong	2	1	1	0	7	3	4
Laos	2	1	0	1	3	6	3
Bangladesh	2	0	1	1	3	4	1

Group E

In Singapore

Mar 21
Macao 0
Pakistan 3 (Qadeer 27, 65, Sarfraz 51)
HT: 0-1

Mar 23
Singapore 2 (Azhar 23, Indra 58)
Macao 0
HT: 1-0

Mar 25
Singapore 3 (Indra 8, pen 35, Noh 66)
Pakistan 0
HT: 2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Singapore	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Pakistan	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Macao	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group F

In Bhutan
Apr 23: Guam v Bhutan
Apr 25: Guam v Mongolia
Apr 27: Mongolia v Bhutan

Group G

Mar 23 - North Korea
North Korea 2
India 0
HT: 1-0

Mar 30 - Goa
India 1 (Vijayan 29)
North Korea 1 (Pak Yong-chul 85)
HT: 1-0
North Korea 3-1 on agg

Group winners qualify for qualifying round

QUALIFYING ROUND – draw

Group A: Uzbekistan, Thailand, Tajikistan, Hong Kong.
Group B: Qatar, Kuwait, Palestine, Singapore.
Group C: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Indonesia, Winner Preliminary Round Group F.
Group D: Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, North Korea.
Group E: South Korea, Oman, Vietnam, Nepal.
Group F: Iraq, Bahrain, Malaysia, Myanmar.
Group G: United Arab Emirates, Syria, Turkmenistan, Sri Lanka.

Qualifying round games to be played on a home-and-away basis between August 19, 2003 and February 18, 2004.
Group winners and runners-up qualify for finals

China (hosts) and Japan (holders) qualify automatically for finals

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RESULTS MAY 2003

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP 2004 QUALIFIERS

● *Details on recent round of matches in next month's issue*

Group 1

08.09.02.....Angola-Nigeria.....0-0
12.10.02.....Malawi-Angola.....1-0
29.03.03.....Malawi-Nigeria.....0-1
07.06.03.....Nigeria-Malawi
21.06.03.....Nigeria-Angola
04.07.03.....Angola-Malawi
Djibouti withdrew

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Malawi	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Angola	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Group 2

07.09.02.....Niger-Ethiopia.....3-1
08.09.02.....Guinea-Liberia.....3-0
12.10.02.....Liberia-Niger.....1-0
13.10.02.....Ethiopia-Guinea.....1-0
30.03.03.....Ethiopia-Liberia.....1-0
30.03.03.....Guinea-Niger.....2-0
08.06.03.....Liberia-Ethiopia
08.06.03.....Niger-Guinea
21.06.03.....Ethiopia-Niger
22.06.03.....Liberia-Guinea
06.07.03.....Guinea-Ethiopia
06.07.03.....Niger-Liberia

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	3	2	0	1	5	1	6
Ethiopia	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
Niger	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Liberia	3	1	0	2	1	4	3

Group 3

08.09.02.....Benin-Tanzania.....4-0
08.09.02.....Sudan-Zambia.....0-1
12.10.02.....Tanzania-Sudan.....1-2
12.10.02.....Zambia-Benin.....1-1
29.03.03.....Sudan-Benin.....3-0
29.03.03.....Tanzania-Zambia.....0-1
07.06.03.....Zambia-Tanzania
08.06.03.....Benin-Sudan
21.06.03.....Tanzania-Benin
21.06.03.....Zambia-Sudan
06.07.03.....Benin-Zambia
06.07.03.....Sudan-Tanzania

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Sudan	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Benin	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Tanzania	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group 4

08.09.02.....Congo-Burkina Faso.....0-0
09.09.02.....Central African Rep-Mozambique...1-1
13.10.02.....Burkina Faso-Central African Rep...2-1
13.10.02.....Mozambique-Congo.....0-3
30.03.03.....Mozambique-Burkina Faso.....0-0
TBA.....Congo-Central African Rep
07.06.03.....Burkina Faso-Mozambique
08.06.03.....Central African Rep-Congo
21.06.03.....Burkina Faso-Congo
22.06.03.....Mozambique-Central African Rep
06.07.03.....Central African Rep-Burkina Faso
06.07.03.....Congo-Mozambique

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Congo	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Mozambique	3	0	2	1	1	4	2
Cent Af Rep	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group 5

06.09.02.....Mauritania-Cape Verde Islands.....0-2
07.09.02.....Kenya-Togo.....3-0
12.10.02.....Cape Verde Islands-Kenya.....0-1
12.10.02.....Togo-Mauritania.....1-0
29.03.03.....Cape Verde Islands-Togo.....2-1
29.03.03.....Kenya-Mauritania.....4-0
06.06.03.....Mauritania-Kenya
08.06.03.....Togo-Cape Verde Islands
22.06.03.....Cape Verde Islands-Mauritania
22.06.03.....Togo-Kenya
04.07.03.....Mauritania-Togo
05.07.03.....Kenya-Cape Verde Islands

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kenya	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
Cape Verde Is	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Togo	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Mauritania	3	0	0	3	0	7	0

Group 6

08.09.02.....Seychelles-Eritrea.....1-0
08.09.02.....Zimbabwe-Mali.....1-0
12.10.02.....Eritrea-Zimbabwe.....0-1
13.10.02.....Mali-Seychelles.....3-0
30.03.03.....Eritrea-Mali.....0-2
30.03.03.....Zimbabwe-Seychelles.....3-1
07.06.03.....Seychelles-Zimbabwe
08.06.03.....Mali-Eritrea
21.06.03.....Eritrea-Seychelles
22.06.03.....Mali-Zimbabwe
05.07.03.....Seychelles-Mali
06.07.03.....Zimbabwe-Eritrea

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zimbabwe	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Mali	3	2	0	1	5	1	6
Seychelles	3	1	0	2	2	6	3
Eritrea	3	0	0	3	0	4	0

Group 7

07.09.02.....Gabon-Morocco.....0-1
08.09.02.....Equatorial Guinea-Sierra Leone.....1-3
12.10.02.....Sierra Leone-Gabon.....2-0
13.10.02.....Morocco-Equatorial Guinea.....5-0
29.03.03.....Gabon-Equatorial Guinea.....4-0
29.03.03.....Sierra Leone-Morocco.....0-0
07.06.03.....Morocco-Sierra Leone
08.06.03.....Equatorial Guinea-Gabon
21.06.03.....Morocco-Gabon
21.06.03.....Sierra Leone-Equatorial Guinea
06.07.03.....Equatorial Guinea-Morocco
06.07.03.....Gabon-Sierra Leone

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	3	2	1	0	6	0	7
Sierra Leone	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Gabon	3	1	0	2	4	3	3
Equatorial Guinea	3	0	0	3	1	12	0

Group 8

08.09.02.....Lesotho-Senegal.....0-1
13.10.02.....Gambia-Lesotho.....6-0
30.03.03.....Gambia-Senegal.....0-0
08.06.03.....Senegal-Gambia
22.06.03.....Senegal-Lesotho
06.07.03.....Lesotho-Gambia
Sao Tome e Principe withdrew

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gambia	2	1	1	0	6	0	4
Senegal	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Lesotho	2	0	0	2	0	7	0

Group 9

07.09.02.....Botswana-Swaziland.....0-0
08.09.02.....Libya-DR Congo.....3-2
13.10.02.....DR Congo-Botswana.....2-0
13.10.02.....Swaziland-Libya.....2-1
30.03.03.....Libya-Botswana.....0-0
30.03.03.....Swaziland-DR Congo.....1-1
08.06.03.....Botswana-Libya
08.06.03.....DR Congo-Swaziland
22.06.03.....DR Congo-Libya
22.06.03.....Swaziland-Botswana
04.07.03.....Libya-Swaziland
06.07.03.....Botswana-DR Congo

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Swaziland	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
DR Congo	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Libya	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Botswana	3	0	2	1	0	2	2

Group 10

07.09.02.....Madagascar-Egypt.....1-0
12.10.02.....Mauritius-Madagascar.....0-1
29.03.03.....Mauritius-Egypt.....0-1
06.06.03.....Egypt-Mauritius
20.06.03.....Egypt-Madagascar
06.07.03.....Madagascar-Mauritius
Guinea-Bissau withdrew

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Madagascar	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Egypt	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Mauritius	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Group 11

08.09.02.....Ivory Coast-South Africa.....0-0
13.10.02.....South Africa-Burundi.....2-0
30.03.03.....Burundi-Ivory Coast.....0-1
08.06.03.....Ivory Coast-Burundi
22.06.03.....South Africa-Ivory Coast
06.07.03.....Burundi-South Africa

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Ivory Coast	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Burundi	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

Group 12

07.09.02.....Namibia-Algeria.....0-1
11.10.02.....Algeria-Chad.....4-1
30.03.03.....Chad-Namibia.....2-0
07.06.03.....Namibia-Chad
20.06.03.....Algeria-Namibia
06.07.03.....Chad-Algeria

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Chad	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Namibia	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

Group 13

07.09.02.....Uganda-Ghana.....1-0
13.10.02.....Ghana-Rwanda.....4-2
29.03.03.....Rwanda-Uganda.....0-0
07.06.03.....Uganda-Rwanda
22.06.03.....Ghana-Uganda
06.07.03.....Rwanda-Ghana

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uganda	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Ghana	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Rwanda	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

● The 13 group winners qualify for the finals, along with hosts Tunisia and holders Cameroon.
● The 16th finals place will be awarded to the best second-placed finisher from Groups 2 to 9. This will be decided first by the highest number of points, then goal difference, then highest number of goals scored and, if necessary, a play-off.

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

2nd group phase

Group A

March 11

Barcelona (Spa) 2 (Saviola 16, Kleine og 49)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 62,228. **Ref:** Bre (Fra)
Barcelona: Bonano - Gabri, Andersson, De Boer (Oleguer 62), Reiziger - Overmars (Iniesta 68), Xavi, Mendieta, Riquelme - Saviola (Motta 46), Kluivert.
Leverkusen: Butt - Ojigwe, Cris, Kaluzny, Kleine, Babic (Dogan 33) - Basturk (Schneider 73), Balitsch, Simak - Berbatov (Brdaric 58), Franca.

Internazionale (Ita) 2 (Vieri 46, Cordoba 60)
Newcastle United (Eng) 2 (Shearer 42, 49)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 53,459. **Ref:** Cortez Batista (Por)
Inter: Toldo - J Zanetti, Cordoba, Cannavaro, Coco - Sergio Conceicao, Okan, Di Biagio, Guglielminpietro (Martins 46) - Emre (Pasquale 78) - Vieri.
Newcastle: Given - Griffin, O'Brien (Hughes 59), Bramble, Bernard - Solano (Lua Lua 83), Jenas, Speed, Robert (Hugo Viana 83) - Shearer, Bellamy.

March 19

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Internazionale 2 (Martins 36, Emre 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 22,500. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)
Leverkusen: Butt - Ojigwe, Kleine, Kaluzny, Placente - Brdaric (Neuville 46), Ramelow, Basturk (Schneider 46) - Simak (Cris 63) - Bierofka, Franca.
Inter: Toldo - J Zanetti, Cordoba, Cannavaro, Coco - Sergio Conceicao (Guglielminpietro 83), Okan (C Zanetti 19), Di Biagio, Emre - Morfeo (Pasquale 75), Martins.

Newcastle United 0
Barcelona 2 (Kluivert 60, Motta 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 51,883. **Ref:** Wegereef (Hol)
Newcastle: Given - Griffin, O'Brien, Bramble, Bernard - Solano (Ameobi 66), Jenas, Dyer, Robert (Hugo Viana 66) - Shearer, Bellamy.
Barcelona: Victor Valdes - Gabri, Andersson, De Boer, Reiziger - Rochemback, Xavi (Gerard 46), Motta, Mendieta (Iniesta 66) - Kluivert (Sergio Garcia 70), Riquelme.

GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	5	1	0	12	2	16
Internazionale	6	3	2	1	11	8	11
Newcastle	6	2	1	3	10	13	7
Bayer Leverkusen	6	0	0	6	5	15	0

Group B

March 11

Ajax (Hol) 1 (Pasanen 56)
Valencia (Spa) 1 (Kily Gonzalez pen 28)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 48,633. **Ref:** Michel (Slk)
Ajax: Lobont - Trabelsi, Pasanen, Chivu, O'Brien - De Jong (Van der Meyde 46), Galasek, Pienaar, Maxwell - Van der Vaart, Ibrahimovic.
Valencia: Canizares - Reveillere, Ayala (Marchena 88), Pellegrino, Carboni - Rufete, Albelda, Aimar (J Sanchez 84), Baraja, Kily Gonzalez - Carew (Mista 64).

Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Vieira 12)
Roma (Ita) 1 (Cassano 45)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 35,472. **Ref:** Meier (Swi)
Arsenal: Seaman - Lauren (Kanu 87), Keown, Cygan, Van Bronckhorst - Wiltord (Ljungberg 73), Vieira, Gilberto Silva, Pires - Bergkamp (Jeffers 73), Henry.
Roma: Pelizzoli - Panucci, Aldair, Samuel, Candela - Cafu, Tommasi, Emerson, Lima - Totti, Cassano (Montella 62). *Sent off: Totti 22min.*

March 19

Roma 1 (Cassano 24)
Ajax 1 (Van der Meyde 1)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 54,502. **Ref:** Fandel (Ger)
Roma: Pelizzoli - Cufre, Panucci, Aldair, Candela - Cafu (Fuser 80), Tommasi (Guigou 80), Emerson, Lima (Montella 66) - Delvecchio, Cassano.
Ajax: Lobont - Trabelsi, Pasanen, Chivu, O'Brien (Van Damme 90) - Pienaar, Van der Vaart, Galasek, Maxwell - Ibrahimovic (Witschge 90), Van der Meyde (Sikora 72).

Valencia 2 (Carew 34, 57)
Arsenal 1 (Henry 49)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 53,000. **Ref:** Vassaras (Gre)
Valencia: Canizares (Palop 71) - Reveillere, Pellegrino, Ayala, Carboni - Albelda - Rufete, Aimar, Vicente - J Sanchez (Angulo 68), Carew (Marchena 89).
Arsenal: Taylor - Lauren, Campbell, Cygan, Toure (Kanu 86) - Wiltord (Jeffers 76), Vieira, Gilberto Silva, Ljungberg - Pires - Henry.

GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valencia	6	2	3	1	5	6	9
Ajax	6	1	5	0	6	5	8
Arsenal	6	1	4	1	6	5	7
Roma	6	1	2	3	7	8	5

Group C

March 12

Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 3 (Frings 39, Koller 58, Amoroso 66)
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,000. **Ref:** De Bleeckere (Blg)
Dortmund: Lehmann - Evanilson, Worns, Metzelder, Dede (Madouni 20) - Reuter, Kehl - Frings - Ewerthon, Koller (Ricken 70), Amoroso (Herrlich 83).
Lokomotiv: Ovchinnikov - Obradovic (Julio Cesar 46), Pachinin, Ignashevich, Sennikov - Mnguni, Evseev - Maminov, Lekgetho - Izmailov, Pimenov.

Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Raul 12, 56, Guti 85)
Milan (Ita) 1 (Rivaldo 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 75,000. **Ref:** Milton Nielsen (Den)
Real Madrid: Casillas - Michel Salgado, Ivan Helguera, Pavon, Roberto Carlos - Flavio Conceicao, Makelele - Figo, Raul (Portillo 89), Zidane (Solari 87) - Ronaldo (Guti 67).
Milan: Abbiati - Simic (Nesta 62), Laursen, Costacurta, Maldini - Dalla Bona (Rui Costa 46), Redondo (Pirlo 79), Seedorf, Brocchi - Shevchenko, Rivaldo.

March 18

Lokomotiv Moscow 0
Real Madrid 1 (Ronaldo 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Colombo (Fra)
Lokomotiv: Ovchinnikov - Pachinin, Ignashevich, Nizhegorodov - Evseev, Mnguni (Julio Cesar 71), Maminov (Sirkhayev 80), Sennikov - Loskov - Izmailov, Pimenov.
Real Madrid: Casillas - Michel Salgado, Ivan Helguera, Pavon, Solari - Makelele, Flavio Conceicao - Figo, Raul, Zidane (Cambiasso 89) - Ronaldo (Guti 80).

Milan 0
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Koller 80)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 70,577. **Ref:** Barber (Eng)
Milan: Abbiati - Simic, Laursen, Nesta, Maldini (Costacurta 46) - Gattuso, Redondo, Brocchi (Pirlo 82) - Rivaldo, Rui Costa (Inzaghi 62) - Tomasson.
Dortmund: Lehmann - Evanilson, Worns, Metzelder, Dede (Madouni 83) - Reuter (Ricken 50), Frings, Kehl - Ewerthon (Odonkor 74), Koller, Amoroso.

GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan	6	4	0	2	5	4	12
Real Madrid	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
B Dortmund	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Lokomotiv M	6	0	1	5	3	10	1

Group D

March 12

Juventus (Ita) 3 (Ferrara 12, Trezeguet 63, Tudor 90)
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) 2 (Diego Tristan 34, Makaay 51)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 25,070. **Ref:** Frisk (Swe)
Juventus: Buffon - Thuram, Ferrara, Montero, Zambrotta - Tacchinardi (Tudor 77), Davids - Camoranesi (Pessotto 46), Nedved, Di Vaio (Zalayeta 46) - Trezeguet.
Deportivo: Juanmi - Hector, Cesar (Jorge Andrade 71), Naybet, Romero - Scaloni, Duscher, Mauro Silva, Fran (Capdevila 46) - Makaay, Diego Tristan (Valeron 66).

Manchester United (Eng) 1 (G Neville 53)
Basle (Swi) 1 (Gimenez 14)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 66,870. **Ref:** Larsen (Den)
Man Utd: Carroll - G Neville, Blanc (Scholes 73), Ferdinand, O'Shea - Solskjaer, Fletcher (Beckham 73), Butt, P Neville, Richardson (Giggs 46) - Forlan.
Basle: Zuberbuhler - Haas, Zwyssig, M Yakin, Atouba - Barberis, Cantaluppi, Chipperfield - H Yakin - Rossi (Huggel 62), Gimenez (Tum 77).

March 18

Basle 2 (Cantaluppi 37, Gimenez 90)
Juventus 1 (Tacchinardi 10)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 30,501. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Basle: Zuberbuhler - Haas, M Yakin, Zwyssig, Atouba - Barberis (Huggel 56), Cantaluppi, Chipperfield - H Yakin (Varela 79) - Gimenez, Rossi (Tum 72).
Juventus: Buffon - Thuram (Del Piero 69), Iuliano, Montero, Birindelli - Tudor (Pessotto 46), Tacchinardi - Zenoni, Nedved, Zambrotta - Trezeguet (Salas 30).

Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Victor 31, Lynch og 47)
Manchester United 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Hrinak (Slk)
Deportivo: Dani Mallo - Manuel Pablo, Cesar, Jorge Andrade (Djorovic 63), Capdevila - Acuna, Duscher - Victor (Hector 77), Valeron, Fran (Scaloni 51) - Luque.
Man Utd: Ricardo - Roche (Stewart 46), Blanc, O'Shea - Lynch, Fletcher, P Neville, Butt, Pugh - Forlan (Richardson 71), Giggs (Webber 71).

GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester Utd	6	4	1	1	11	5	13
Juventus	6	2	1	3	11	11	7
Basle	6	2	1	3	5	10	7
Dep La Coruna	6	2	1	3	7	8	7

Top two from each group qualify for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals draw

Ajax v Milan
Real Madrid v Manchester United
1st legs, April 8; 2nd legs, April 23

Internazionale v Valencia
Juventus v Barcelona
1st legs, April 9; 2nd legs, April 22

Semi-finals draw

Real Madrid/Manchester Utd v Juventus/Barcelona
1st leg, May 6; 2nd leg, May 14

Ajax/Milan v Internazionale/Valencia
1st leg, May 7; 2nd leg, May 13

Final

Old Trafford, Manchester; May 28

UEFA CUP

Quarter-finals, 1st legs

March 13

Celtic (Sco) 1 (Larsson 3)
Liverpool (Eng) 1 (Heskey 17)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 59,759. **Ref:** Hauge (Nor)
Celtic: Douglas - Mjallby, Balde, Valgaeren - Smith, Lennon, Petrov, Thompson (Guppy 25) - Sutton - Hartson, Larsson (Lambert 75).
Liverpool: Dudek - Carragher, Traore, Hyypia, Riise - Diouf (Biscan 90), Hamann, Gerrard, Murphy - Heskey, Owen.

Lazio (Ita) 1 (Inzaghi 55)
Besiktas (Tur) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Mejuto Gonzalez (Spa)
Lazio: Peruzzi - Stam, Fernando Couto, Mihajlovic, Favalli (Inzaghi 50) - Lazetic (Liverani 84), Simeone, Stankovic, Cesar - Claudio Lopez, Chiesa (Fiore 73).
Besiktas: Cordoba - Ali Beserler, Ronaldo, Ahmet Yildirim - Niyazi (Kaan 75), Tayfur (Ahmet Dursun 75), Giunti (Yasin 70), Serdar - Sergen - Pancu, Ilhan.

Malaga (Spa) 1 (Dely Valdes 17)
Boavista (Por) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Collina (Ita)
Malaga: Contreras - Josemi, Fernando Sanz, Roteta, Valcarce - Manu, Romero, Sandro (Canabal 74), Musampa - Dely Valdes (Leko 74), Silva.
Boavista: Ricardo - Rui Oscar (Bosingwa 46), Paulo Turra, Eder, Mario Loja - Avalos, Pedrosa, Alexandre Goulart (Yuri 71), Martelinho - Jocivalter, Jorge Couto (Luiz Claudio 46).

FC Porto (Por) 0
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Olisadebe 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 44,310. **Ref:** Messina (Ita)
Porto: Vitor Baia - Paulo Ferreira, Jorge Costa, Pedro Emanuel, Mario Silva - Deco, Costinha (Alenichev 56), Maniche - Capucho (Cesar Peixoto 46), Helder Postiga, Derlei (Jankauskas 56).
Panathinaikos: Nikopolidis - Seitaridis, Henriksen, Kyrgiakos, Fissas - Karagounis (Goumas 87), Basinas, Michaelsen, Kolkka - Limberopoulos (Lincar 90), Olisadebe (Constantinou 87).

Quarter-finals, 2nd legs

March 20

Besiktas 1 (Sergen 82)
Lazio 2 (Fiore 5, Castroman 9)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Poll (Eng)
Lazio 3-1 on agg
Besiktas: Cordoba - Tayfur, Ronaldo, Ahmet Yildirim - Niyazi (Kaan 46), Yasin, Pancu, Ibrahim - Sergen - Ahmet Dursun (Nouma 62), Ilhan.
Lazio: Peruzzi - Stam, Fernando Couto, Mihajlovic (Negro 83), Favalli - Castroman, Giannichedda, Stankovic, Cesar (Simeone 60) - Fiore (Chiesa 76) - Claudio Lopez.

Boavista 1 (Luiz Claudio 83)
Malaga 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-0. **Att:** 8,500.
Ref: Veissiere (Fra)
Agg 1-1. Boavista 4-1 on pens
Boavista: Ricardo - Martelinho, Paulo Turra, Eder, Mario Loja - Jocivalter (Alexandre Goulart 59), Filipe Anunciacao, Pedrosa (Pedro Santos 100) - Duda, E Silva, Jorge Couto (Luiz Claudio 19).
Malaga: Contreras - Josemi, Fernando Sanz, Litos, Roteta - Bravo, Miguel Angel - Manu, Sandro (Canabal 65), Musampa (Leko 96) - Silva (Dely Valdes 69). *Sent off: Sandro 120min.*

Liverpool 0
Celtic 2 (Thompson 45, Hartson 82)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 44,238. **Ref:** Merk (Ger)
Celtic 3-1 on agg
Liverpool: Dudek - Carragher, Traore, Hyypia, Riise - Murphy, Gerrard, Hamann, Smicer (Baros 56) - Heskey, Owen.
Celtic: Douglas - Mjallby, Balde, Valgaeren - Sylla (Smith 86), Lambert (McNamara 73), Petrov, Lennon, Thompson - Hartson, Larsson.

Panathinaikos 0
FC Porto 2 (Derlei 16, 103)
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 0-1. **Att:** 16,000.
Ref: Temmink (Hol)
Porto 2-1 on agg
Panathinaikos: Nikopolidis - Seitaridis (Warzycha 106), Henriksen, Kyrgiakos, Fissas - Karagounis, Michaelsen, Konstantinidis (Goumas 46), Kolkka - Olisadebe (Constantinou 81), Limberopoulos.
Porto: Vitor Baia - Paulo Ferreira, Jorge Costa, Ricardo Carvalho, Mario Silva (Ricardo Costa 72) - Deco, Costinha, Maniche, Alenichev (Tiago 63) - Helder Postiga (Marco Ferreira 84), Derlei.

Semi-finals draw

Celtic v Boavista
FC Porto v Lazio
1st legs, April 10; 2nd legs, April 24

AUSTRIA

Mar 8: Bregenz 0 Sturm Graz 2; Grazer AK 2 SV Ried 0; Pasching 0 Admira 0; Salzburg 1 Karnten 1.
Mar 9: Rapid Wien 1 Austria Wien 1.
Mar 12: Pasching 3 SV Ried 0.
Mar 15: Karnten 1 Rapid Wien 0; SV Ried 1 Bregenz 3; Salzburg 1 Grazer AK 1; Sturm Graz 2 Admira 1.
Mar 16: Austria Wien 0 Pasching 1.
Mar 18: Rapid Wien 0 Admira 0.
Mar 22: Bregenz 1 Austria Wien 2; Grazer AK 3 Karnten 0; Pasching 0 Salzburg 1; Admira 0 SV Ried 1.
Mar 23: Rapid Wien 1 Sturm Graz 0.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria Wien	26	17	5	4	50	18	56
Pasching	26	12	7	7	34	23	43
Grazer AK	26	10	9	7	39	28	39
Sturm Graz	26	12	3	11	36	42	39
Rapid Wien	26	9	9	8	32	27	36
SV Ried	26	9	7	10	32	32	34
Salzburg	26	8	8	10	29	39	32
Karnten	26	7	6	13	28	40	27
Bregenz	26	5	9	12	34	45	24
Admira	26	5	9	12	21	41	24

BELGIUM

Friday, March 7

Standard 1 (Arst 78)
Lokeren 2 (Bangoura 37, Kristinsson 41) Att: 13,000

Saturday, March 8

Charleroi 2 (Eduardo 70, Boeka-Lisasi 86)
Mons 1 (Roussel 30) Att: 14,367

Gent 3 (Kaklamanos 13, Kraouche 32, Ribus 84)
St Truiden 0 Att: 8,519

Mechelen 2 (Gregoire 65, El Yamani 89)
Germinal Beerschot 0 Att: 6,100

Mouscron 0
Club Brugge 4 (Verheyen 10, Mendoza 36, Clement 79, Smolders 90) Att: 11,000

Royal Antwerp 2 (Verbeeck 3, Evens 75)
Lierse 2 (Schaessens pen 45, 84) Att: 7,500

Westerlo 1 (Delen 62)
Lommel 2 (Nygaard 72, De Conde 87) Att: 5,000

Sunday, March 9

Beveren 0
La Louviere 3 (Kenmogne 10, 21, Ishiaku 45) Att: 3,000

Genk 0
Anderlecht 1 (Jestrovic 73) Att: 24,749

Saturday, March 15

Beveren 1 (Pierre 62)
Genk 4 (Demets og 5, Dagano 49, Sonck 57, Vandenbergh 85) Att: 4,000

Club Brugge 1 (Mendoza 50)
Charleroi 2 (Dufer 1, Boeka-Lisasi 22) Att: 20,341

Lokeren 5 (Gretarsson pen 3, 44, Bangoura 59, 70, Baldvinsson 68)
Gent 1 (Machete 29) Att: 8,000

Lommel 4 (Djokic 25, 55, Haeldermans 57, Valenta 86)
Mechelen 1 (Nijs 75) Att: 8,500

St Truiden 1 (Boffin 1)
Royal Antwerp 0 Att: 7,000

Sunday, March 16

Germinal Beerschot 0
Standard 1 (Arst 81) Att: 6,500

La Louviere 0
Westerlo 0 Att: 3,000

Lierse 1 (Fassotte 65)
Mouscron 0 Att: 7,500

Mons 1 (Doll og 36)
Anderlecht 2 (Jestrovic 56, Seol 69) Att: 8,500

Saturday, March 22

Charleroi 0
Lierse 1 (Delorge 80) Att: 10,128

Genk 2 (Roumani 2, Thijs 70)
Mons 0 Att: 23,871

Gent 1 (Kraouche 37)
Germinal Beerschot 0 Att: 7,900

Mouscron 1 (Zewlakow 64)
St Truiden 2 (Buvens 4, Kalisa 68) Att: 9,002

Royal Antwerp 1 (Gomez 12)
Lokeren 2 (Kimoto 35, Gretarsson pen 65) Att: 6,000

Standard 4 (Arst 37, pen 72, Oussalah 68, Scavone og 70)
Lommel 0 Att: 11,500

Sunday, March 23

Anderlecht 5 (Lovre 28, Jestrovic 43, 45, Junior 58, Dindane 72)
Club Brugge 1 (Ceh 38) Att: 26,516

Mechelen 0
La Louviere 1 (Cooreman 56) Att: 5,200

Westerlo 2 (Delen 3, Brogno pen 70)
Beveren 0 Att: 3,500

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	26	22	1	3	81	26	67
Anderlecht	26	18	2	6	59	28	56
Lokeren	26	17	4	5	60	35	55
Lierse	26	16	7	3	45	23	55
Genk	26	14	6	6	61	39	48
St Truiden	26	14	6	6	54	33	48
Standard	26	11	7	8	43	32	40
Gent	26	12	2	12	40	42	38
Mons	26	11	3	12	36	32	36
La Louviere	26	8	7	11	29	32	31
Mouscron	26	8	5	13	37	53	29
Westerlo	26	8	3	15	23	41	27
Royal Antwerp	26	7	5	14	35	48	26
Beveren	26	8	2	16	32	63	26
Lommel	26	7	3	16	28	48	24
Germinal B	26	6	4	16	37	48	22
Charleroi	26	5	6	15	30	56	21
Mechelen	26	3	5	18	18	69	14

LEADING GOALSCORERS
21 Wesley Sonck (Genk)
17 Cedric Roussel (Mons)

BULGARIA

Mar 8: Rilski Sportist 1 CSKA 1; Lokomotiv Sofia 4 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 1; Spartak Varna 1 Dobrudzha 0; Botev 1 Marek 0; Levski 1 Slavia 2.
Mar 9: Naftex 2 Chernomorets 0.
Mar 15: Cherno More 3 Naftex 1; Marek 0 Lovech 0; Chernomorets 1 Spartak Varna 2; Dobrudzha 1 Lokomotiv Sofia 0; Levski 6 Rilski Sportist 0.
Mar 16: Slavia 5 Botev 0.
Mar 21: Lovech 2 Slavia 1.
Mar 22: Botev 0 Levski 3; Rilski Sportist 0 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 4; Lokomotiv Sofia 3 Chernomorets 0; Spartak Varna 2 Cherno More 1; Naftex 1 Marek 1; CSKA 3 Dobrudzha 0.

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	17	15	2	0	42	7	47
Levski	18	14	1	3	47	15	43
Lovech	17	11	4	2	31	8	37
Slavia	18	11	2	5	44	20	35
Lok Plovdiv	17	10	2	5	37	22	32
Naftex	18	9	1	8	24	24	28
Cherno More	17	8	3	6	23	15	27
Spartak Varna	18	7	3	8	19	24	24
Marek	18	5	4	9	20	27	19
Lok Sofia	18	5	3	10	17	23	18
Chernomorets	18	5	2	11	20	32	17
Botev	18	4	2	12	18	46	14
Rilski Sportist	18	1	4	13	11	44	7
Dobrudzha	18	2	1	15	10	56	7

CROATIA

Mar 8: Osijek 1 Kamen Ingrad 0; Sibenik 2 Cibalia 1; Varteks 2 Slaven 0; Zagreb 2 Pomorac 1; Hajduk 4 Zadar 0.
Mar 9: Rijeka 0 Dinamo 1.
Mar 15: Zadar 2 Zagreb 1; Pomorac 1 Varteks 0; Slaven 2 Rijeka 0; Dinamo 3 Sibenik 1; Cibalia 1 Kamen Ingrad 1.
Mar 16: Hajduk 2 Osijek 0.
Mar 22: Osijek 1 Cibalia 0; Kamen Ingrad 0 Dinamo 1; Sibenik 1 Slaven 0; Rijeka 1 Pomorac 1; Varteks 3 Zadar 1; Zagreb 2 Hajduk 1.

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	22	18	3	1	51	17	57
Hajduk	22	16	2	4	42	14	50
Varteks	22	15	0	7	40	21	45
Cibalia	22	9	5	8	28	28	32
Kamen Ingrad	22	7	9	6	23	22	30
Zagreb	22	8	6	8	28	30	30
Slaven	22	9	2	11	24	26	29
Osijek	22	6	5	11	21	39	23
Zadar	22	5	6	11	21	40	21
Rijeka	22	5	3	14	23	33	18
Pomorac	22	3	8	11	26	41	17
Sibenik	22	4	5	13	23	39	17

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mar 8: Sparta 5 Liberec 0.
Mar 9: Zlin 1 Chmel Blsany 0; Ceske Budejovice 2 Brno 1; Jablonec 1 Slavia 1; Bohemians 3 Zizkov 2; Pribram 5 Hradec Kralove 0; Teplice 0 Synot 0.
Mar 10: Olomouc 1 Ostrava 0.
Mar 15: Slavia 3 Teplice 1.
Mar 16: Zizkov 2 Jablonec 1; Hradec Kralove 1 Zlin 1; Chmel Blsany 4 Pribram 3; Brno 0 Olomouc 0; Synot 0 Sparta 1; Ostrava 1 Ceske Budejovice 0.
Mar 17: Liberec 2 Bohemians 0.
Mar 19: Olomouc 2 Synot 1.
Mar 22: Zlin 1 Slavia 1.
Mar 23: Jablonec 2 Chmel Blsany 1; Bohemians 3 Hradec Kralove 1; Ceske Budejovice 2 Synot 1; Pribram 2 Ostrava 1; Sparta 1 Brno 0; Olomouc 0 Zizkov 0.
Mar 24: Teplice 2 Liberec 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	21	15	3	3	36	9	48
Slavia	21	12	8	1	42	14	44
Teplice	21	11	3	7	26	23	36
Zizkov	21	10	5	6	29	26	35
Liberec	21	11	2	8	31	29	35
Ostrava	21	10	4	7	31	23	34
Synot	21	8	5	8	24	24	29
Pribram	21	7	6	8	27	24	27
Ceske Budejovice	21	8	3	10	27	34	27
Chmel Blsany	21	7	3	11	22	27	24
Jablonec	21	5	9	7	23	31	24
Zlin	21	5	8	8	22	31	23
Olomouc	21	5	7	9	18	22	22
Brno	21	5	6	10	20	24	21
Bohemians	21	4	6	11	30	44	18
Hradec Kralove	21	1	10	10	17	40	13

DENMARK

Mar 15: Brondby 2 Viborg 1.
Mar 16: Midtjylland 2 Esbjerg 0; Koge 1 AaB 1; OB 2 FC Copenhagen 0; Silkeborg 3 AB 1.
Mar 22: Brondby 2 Silkeborg 0.
Mar 23: AaB 0 Esbjerg 1; AB 1 Midtjylland 2; OB 3 Koge 1; AGF 2 FC Copenhagen 2.
Mar 24: Viborg 1 Farum 3.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Copenhagen	20	11	6	3	32	20	39
Brondby	20	10	5	5	40	21	35
Midtjylland	20	8	6	6	30	24	30
Farum	19	10	0	9	29	36	30
OB	20	8	5	7	33	27	29
Esbjerg	20	7	7	6	38	38	28
AaB	20	8	3	9	26	29	27
AB	20	5	8	7	25	25	23
AGF	19	6	5	8	28	35	23
Koge	20	7	2	11	32	44	23
Viborg	20	5	6	9	33	40	21
Silkeborg	20	5	5	10	26	33	20

ENGLAND

Saturday, March 8

Liverpool 2 (Diouf 44, Owen 67)
Bolton 0 Att: 41,462

Saturday, March 15

Aston Villa 0
Manchester Utd 1 (Beckham 12) Att: 42,602

Blackburn 2 (Duff 22, Tugay 52)
Arsenal 0 Att: 29,840

Charlton 0
Newcastle 2 (Shearer pen 33, Solano 49) Att: 26,728

Everton 0
West Ham 0 Att: 40,158

Fulham 2 (Saha 44, M Svensson og 52)
Southampton 2 (Beattie 81, M Svensson 90) Att: 18,031

Leeds 2 (Viduka 24, 76)
Middlesbrough 3 (Maccarone pen 36, Juninho 45, Geremi 64) Att: 39,073

Sunderland 0
Bolton 2 (Okocha 50, Pedersen 55) Att: 42,124

Sunday, March 16

Manchester City 1 (Fowler 72)
Birmingham 0 Att: 34,596

Tottenham 2 (Taricco 49, Sheringham 87)
Liverpool 3 (Owen 51, Heskey 72, Gerrard 82) Att: 36,077

West Brom 0
Chelsea 2 (Stanic 38, Zola 56) Att: 27,024

Saturday, March 22

Birmingham 1 (Horsfield 90)
West Brom 0 Att: 29,449

Chelsea 5 (Hasselbaink 37, Terry 43, Stanic 58, Lampard 69, Gallas 79)
Manchester City 0 Att: 41,105

Manchester Utd 3 (Van Nistelrooy pen 45, 68, 90)
Fulham 0 Att: 67,706

Middlesbrough 1 (Christie 57)
Charlton 1 (Johansson 26) Att: 29,080

Newcastle 5 (Solano 24, Robert 61, Jenas 85, Gresko og 89, Bellamy 90)
Blackburn 1 (Duff 54) Att: 52,106

Southampton 2 (Beattie 40, Davies 90)
Aston Villa 2 (Hendrie 30, Vassell 36) Att: 31,888

West Ham 2 (Defoe 24, Kanoute 65)
Sunderland 0 Att: 35,033

Sunday, March 23

Arsenal 2 (Cygan 8, Vieira 64)
Everton 1 (Rooney 56) Att: 38,042

Liverpool 3 (Owen 12, Murphy 20, Gerrard 73)
Leeds 1 (Viduka 44) Att: 43,021

Monday, March 24

Bolton 1 (Okocha pen 90)
Tottenham 0 Att: 23,084

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	31	20	6	5	66	33	66
Man Utd	31	19	7	5	51	27	64
Newcastle	31	19	4	8	54	35	61
Chelsea	31	15	9	7	57	31	54
Liverpool	31	14	10	7	47	31	52
Everton	31	14	8	9	39	36	50
Charlton	31	13	7	11	40	39	46
Blackburn	31	12	10	9	38	37	46
Southampton	31	11	11	9	34	32	44
Tottenham	31	12	7	12	43	44	43
Middlesbrough	31	11	9	11	39	35	42
Man City	31	12	5	14	40	49	41
Fulham	31	10	8	13	35	40	38
Aston Villa	31	10	6	15	33	37	36
Birmingham	31	9	8	14	28	42	35
Leeds	31	10	4	17	38	45	34
Bolton	31	7	11	13	34	47	32
West Ham	31	7	9	15	34	53	30
West Brom	31	5	6	20	21	47	21
Sunderland	31	4	7	20	19	50	19

LEADING GOALSCORERS
20 James Beattie (Southampton)
19 Thierry Henry (Arsenal)
16 Alan Shearer (Newcastle)

FA CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 8: Arsenal 2 Chelsea 2.
Mar 9: Sheffield Utd 1 Leeds 0; Southampton 2 Wolves 0; Watford 2 Burnley 0.

Quarter-final replay
Mar 25: Chelsea 1 Arsenal 3.

FRANCE

Saturday, March 8

Bastia 1 (Batiles 14)
Strasbourg 1 (Ismael 79) Att: 7,262

Lens 0
Nice 0 Att: 38,349

Lyon 3 (Juninho 9, 39, Anderson 87)
Ajaccio 1 (Lacombe 33) Att: 38,786

Monaco 0
Bordeaux 1 (Darcheville 73) Att: 13,000

Nantes 2 (Pujol 29, Vahirua 90)
Le Havre 0 Att: 31,706

Rennes 0
Auxerre 0 Att: 17,644

Sedan 2 (Asuar 79, Liri 90)
Guingamp 0 Att: 14,000

Sochaux 2 (Saveljic 24, Flachez 30)
Lille 2 (Brunel 58, Manchev 61) Att: 12,818

Troyes 0
Montpellier 2 (Barbosa 39, Doumeng 90) Att: 10,962

Sunday, March 9

Marseille 0
Paris SG 3 (J Leroy 28, 83, Ronaldinho 55) Att: 59,000

Friday, March 14

Lens 0
Nantes 1 (Savinaud 63) Att: 36,800

Lille 2 (Landrin 60, Sterjovski pen 78)
Montpellier 0 Att: 14,006

Sochaux 1 (Saveljic 43)
Ajaccio 1 (Lacombe 66) Att: 13,343

Tuesday, March 18

Guingamp 1 (Bardon 31)
Lille 0 Att: 12,406

Wednesday, March 19

Strasbourg 1 (Ljuboja 64)
Bordeaux 1 (Darcheville pen 90) Att: 12,939

Saturday, March 22

Ajaccio 1 (Lacombe 48)
Rennes 0 Att: 5,500

Auxerre 0
Lens 0 Att: 14,000

Bordeaux 0
Nantes 0 Att: 32,240

Guingamp 2 (Drogba 67, Malouda 90)
Troyes 0 Att: 12,933

Le Havre 0
Monaco 3 (Nonda pen 23, Prso 28, Evra 31) Att: 16,165

Lille 1 (Brunel pen 32)
Bastia 1 (Essien 90) Att: 13,737

Montpellier 1 (Rouviere 71)
Marseille 2 (Sakho 23, Van Buyten 84) Att: 26,096

Paris SG 2 (Pochettino 70, Pedron 86)
Sedan 0 Att: 40,666

Strasbourg 1 (Pena 75)
Sochaux 3 (Frau 33, Pagis 50, Ismael og 86) Att: 12,590

Sunday, March 23

Nice 0
Lyon 1 (Juninho 84) Att: 14,208

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	31	15	10	6	49	24	55
Marseille	31	16	7	8	34	27	55
Lyon	31	15	9	7	53	35	54
Bordeaux	31	14	9	8	42	29	51
Sochaux	31	13	10	8	35	28	49
Nantes	31	14	7	10	34	29	49
Paris SG	31	13	9	9	44	30	48
Nice	31	11	13	7	33	24	46
Auxerre	30	12	9	9	28	26	45
Lens	31	10	14	7	35	27	44
Bastia	31	12	8	11	33	34	44
Guingamp	31	13	4	14	42	44	43
Strasbourg	31	9	10	12	33	43	37
Le Havre	31	9	8	14	23	36	35
Lille	31	8	9	14	26	41	33
Rennes	31	8	8	15	24	34	32
Ajaccio	31	7	11	13	23	36	32
Montpellier	31	7	9	15	29	43	30
Sedan	30	8	6	16	30	46	30
Troyes	31	6	8	17	20	34	26

LEADING GOALSCORERS
17 Shabani Nonda (Monaco)
16 Pauleta (Bordeaux)
12 Djibril Cisse (Auxerre)
12 Juninho (Lyon)

FRENCH CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 15: Bordeaux 2 Lorient 0; Martigues 0 Paris SG 1; Schiltigheim 1 Rennes 2.
Mar 16: Angouleme 0 Auxerre 0 (aet; Auxerre 4-2 on pens).

ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES — GOLDEN SHOE

ESM GOLDEN SHOE STANDINGS AT 23.03.03

pos	name	team	goals	factor	pts
1	Christian Vieri	Internazionale (Ita)	23	2	46
2	James Beattie	Southampton (Eng)	20	2	40
	Roy Makaay	Dep La Coruna (Spa)	20	2	40
4	Thierry Henry	Arsenal (Eng)	19	2	38
5	Mateja Kezman	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	25	1.5	37.5
6	Andrei Krolov	Tallinna VMK (Est)	37	1	37
7	Arman Karamian	Pyunik (Arm)	36	1	36
	Henrik Larsson	Celtic (Sco)	24	1.5	36
9	Shabani Nonda	Monaco (Fra)	17	2	34
10	Ailton	Werder Bremen (Ger)	16	2	32
	Pauleta	Bordeaux (Fra)	16	2	32
	Alan Shearer	Newcastle (Eng)	16	2	32
13	Wesley Sonck	Genk (Blg)	21	1.5	31.5
	Pierre Van Hooijdonk	Feyenoord (Hol)	21	1.5	31.5
15	Giovane Elber	Bayern Munich (Ger)	15	2	30
	Darko Kovacevic	Real Sociedad (Spa)	15	2	30
	Ruud Van Nistelrooy	Manchester Utd (Eng)	15	2	30
18	Vinny Arkins	Portadown (NI)	28	1	28
	Thomas Christiansen	Bochum (Ger)	14	2	28
	Filippo Inzaghi	Milan (Ita)	14	2	28
	Nihat Kahveci	Real Sociedad (Spa)	14	2	28
	Ronaldo	Real Madrid (Spa)	14	2	28

For the latest standings, updated weekly, visit www.worldsoccer.com

GERMANY

Saturday, March 8

Bayern Munich 3 (Pizarro 2, Elber 22, 76)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 50,000

Hertha 6 (Marcelinho pen 7, 35, Preetz 26, 54, Luizao pen 62, Jentzsch og 79)
1860 Munich 0 Att: 32,493

Monchengladbach 1 (Forssell 63)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 33,700

Schalke 1 (Vermant 89)
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Waldoch og 57) Att: 60,886

Stuttgart 1 (Kuranyi 19)
Hamburg 1 (Mahdavikia 43) Att: 37,000

Werder Bremen 2 (Ailton 52, Banovic 56)
Bochum 0 Att: 29,600

Wolfsburg 3 (Maric 6, Prager 29, Ponte 62)
Energie Cottbus 2 (Rink 7, Reghecampf pen 16) Att: 17,136

Sunday, March 9

Hannover 3 (Bobic 41, Idrissou 45, Konstantinidis 67)
Hansa Rostock 1 (Meggle 39) Att: 28,000

Kaiserslautern 5 (Lokvenc 19, Klose pen 25, Dominguez 63, Timm 65, Bjelica 89)
Nurnberg 0 Att: 33,000

Saturday, March 15

Arminia Bielefeld 4 (Diabang 14, 47 82, Wichniarek 54)
Monchengladbach 1 (Van Houdt 75) Att: 26,601

Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Ramelow 68)
Wolfsburg 1 (Maric 81) Att: 22,500

Bochum 1 (Christiansen 90)
Bayern Munich 4 (Pizarro 18, Elber 36, N Kovac 48, Sagnol 88) Att: 32,645

Borussia Dortmund 2 (Frings 33, Leandro 76)
Hannover 0 Att: 68,000

Energie Cottbus 1 (Rost 43)
Kaiserslautern 3 (Klose 39, Hristov 71, Lokvenc 90) Att: 15,216

Hamburg 3 (Romeo 29, 90, Takahara 86)
Schalke 1 (Van Hoogdalem 57) Att: 55,432

Hansa Rostock 1 (Hirsch 72)
Werder Bremen 0 Att: 17,200

Sunday, March 16

1860 Munich 0
Stuttgart 1 (Bordon 41) Att: 20,000

Nurnberg 0
Hertha 3 (Preetz 15, Marx 40, Marcelinho 84) Att: 23,000

Saturday, March 22

Arminia Bielefeld 0
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 26,601

Bayern Munich 1 (Kovar og 60)
Hansa Rostock 0 Att: 43,000

Kaiserslautern 1 (Klose 40)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 40,500

Monchengladbach 2 (Pletsch 55, Forssell 60)
Hamburg 0 Att: 30,550

Schalke 1 (Mpenza 38)
1860 Munich 1 (Van Hoogdalem og 44) Att: 60,688

Werder Bremen 1 (Ailton 10)
Hannover 2 (Bobic 44, 76) Att: 38,000

Wolfsburg 2 (Maric 21, Prager 31)
Bochum 0 Att: 20,973

Sunday, March 23

Hertha 3 (Dardai 72, Alex Alves 85, Preetz 87)
Energie Cottbus 1 (Vagner 10) Att: 40,000

Stuttgart 0
Nurnberg 2 (Jarolim 29, Junior 88) Att: 28,000

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	26	19	5	2	57	16	62
B Dortmund	26	13	8	5	41	20	47
Stuttgart	26	13	7	6	40	29	46
Hertha	26	12	6	8	40	27	42
Hamburg	26	11	7	8	32	32	40
Schalke	26	9	12	5	36	30	39
Werder Bremen	26	11	4	11	40	40	37
Wolfsburg	26	10	5	11	31	33	35
1860 Munich	26	9	7	10	33	41	34
Hannover	26	9	5	12	37	47	32
Kaiserslautern	26	8	7	11	34	34	31
Arminia Bielefeld	26	7	10	9	29	32	31
Hansa Rostock	26	8	7	11	27	32	31
Bochum	26	8	6	12	40	47	30
M'gladbach	26	8	5	13	28	36	29
Nurnberg	26	8	4	14	30	45	28
B Leverkusen	26	7	6	13	32	42	27
Energie Cottbus	26	6	5	15	26	50	23

LEADING GOALSCORERS
16 Ailton (Werder Bremen)
15 Giovane Elber (Bayern Munich)
14 Thomas Christiansen (Bochum)

GREECE

Mar 8: Panahaiki 0 Xanthi 2.
Mar 9: Akratitos 2 Proodeftiki 1; Olympiakos 1 AEK 2; PAOK 0 Iraklis 1; Aigaleo 2 Giannina 1; Panionios 0 Panathinaikos 0; Kallithea 0 Aris 2.
Mar 15: Xanthi 0 Panionios 1; Kallithea 3 Panahaiki 1.
Mar 16: Iraklis 3 Giannina 0; Proodeftiki 0 PAOK 3; Panathinaikos 3 Aigaleo 0; AEK 6 Akratitos 2; Ionikos 0 Olympiakos 2; Aris 1 OFI 1.
Mar 22: Akratitos 1 Ionikos 0; PAOK 0 AEK 1.
Mar 23: Proodeftiki 1 Iraklis 0; Giannina 0 Panathinaikos 0; Aigaleo 0 Xanthi 0; Panionios 2 Kallithea 0; Olympiakos 1 Aris 0; Panahaiki 0 OFI 2.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	24	17	4	3	35	13	55
Olympiakos	24	16	6	2	56	19	54
AEK	24	15	5	4	51	25	50
Panionios	24	14	5	5	29	16	47
PAOK	24	13	4	7	47	27	43
Iraklis	24	12	4	8	34	23	40
Aris	24	11	6	7	27	25	39
Xanthi	24	7	10	7	24	20	31
OFI	23	8	7	8	28	25	31
Aigaleo	24	6	9	9	21	29	27
Proodeftiki	24	6	7	11	21	29	25
Kallithea	24	4	8	12	23	36	20
Akratitos	24	5	4	15	23	51	19
Giannina	24	4	6	14	18	32	18
Ionikos	23	3	8	12	12	31	17
Panahaiki	24	1	5	18	8	56	8

HOLLAND

Friday, March 7

AZ 1 (El Khattabi 51)
Roda JC 0 Att: 6,871

Saturday, March 8

Excelsior 2 (Swerts 31, Holman 86)
Feyenoord 6 (Van Persie 13, Buffel 26, 88, Van Hooijdonk 35, pen 90, Kalou 50) Att: 3,768

NAC 1 (Bobson 31)
De Graafschap 0 Att: 13,240

PSV 2 (Kezman pen 31, Van Bommel 67)
NEC 1 (Schuurman 53) Att: 34,000

Willem II 1 (Shoukov 90)
Twente 2 (Pokak 8, Cairo 31) Att: 13,500

Zwolle 0
Ajax 5 (Van der Vaart 15, 58, Ibrahimovic 21, 65, Van der Haar og 32) Att: 5,000

Sunday, March 9

Groningen 1 (Drent 65)
RBC 0 Att: 11,934

RKC 3 (Hoogendorp 14, Cornelisse 52, Oost 80)
Heerenveen 0 Att: 6,212

Vitesse 1 (Peeters 78)
Utrecht 4 (Kuijt 20, 54, Vreven 31, Roiha 82) Att: 22,800

Wednesday, March 12

De Graafschap 1 (Van de Haar 90)
Utrecht 0 Att: 11,000

Saturday, March 15

De Graafschap 2 (Van de Haar 35, 77)
RKC 4 (Fuchs 4, Van den Berg 11, Hoogendorp 67, Cornelisse 90) Att: 10,500

Heerenveen 3 (Nurmela pen 59, Selakovic 71, 76)
Twente 0 Att: 14,400

Roda JC 0
NAC 0 Att: 13,300

Vitesse 0
PSV 5 (Van Halst og 2, Robben 34, Van Bommel 37, Bruggink 79, 86) Att: 23,900

Zwolle 1 (De Ridder 27)
RBC 1 (Den Ouden 85) Att: 6,350

Sunday, March 16

Ajax 2 (Ibrahimovic 25, 82)
Excelsior 1 (Lopes 4) Att: 47,192

AZ 2 (Buskermolen 12, Van Galen 26)
Utrecht 0 Att: 7,103

Groningen 1 (Matthijs 90)
Willem II 1 (Mghizrat 77) Att: 12,460

NEC 1 (Wielaert pen 11)
Feyenoord 2 (Van Hooijdonk 38, 87) Att: 12,500

Friday, March 21

Excelsior 0
Zwolle 1 (Lim-Duan 89) Att: 2,864

Saturday, March 22

AZ 3 (Van Galen 42, Nelisse 45, Buskermolen 58)
De Graafschap 1 (Duits 51) Att: 7,105

Feyenoord 5 (Buffel 10, Van Persie 49, Van Hooijdonk 58, 62, pen 69)
Heerenveen 0 Att: 46,200

RBC 3 (Vos pen 13, De Graaf 30, Den Ouden 61)
Vitesse 1 (Mbamba 90) Att: 5,000

Roda JC 2 (Filipovic 34, Anastasiou 57)
NEC 1 (Demouge 1) Att: 12,500

Twente 2 (Houwing 43, Polak 90)
RKC 1 (Janssen 16) Att: 13,200

Sunday, March 23

NAC 0
Willem II 0 Att: 14,325

PSV 2 (Kezman pen 10, 88)
Ajax 0 Att: 35,000

Utrecht 0
Groningen 0 Att: 16,500

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	25	21	3	1	63	11	66
Ajax	25	17	5	3	62	24	56
Feyenoord	25	17	4	4	68	29	55
Roda JC	25	11	7	7	39	33	40
RKC	25	12	4	9	31	31	40
Utrecht	25	9	9	7	33	29	36
NEC	25	10	6	9	31	33	36
NAC	25	8	11	6	28	22	35
AZ	25	10	5	10	39	53	35
Willem II	25	9	6	10	36	34	33
Heerenveen	25	8	7	10	40	42	31
Twente	25	7	9	9	28	37	30
RBC	25	8	5	12	28	37	29
Groningen	25	5	7	13	24	36	22
Vitesse	25	5	5	15	23	40	20
Zwolle	25	5	5	15	21	52	20
Excelsior	25	4	7	14	28	48	19
De Graafschap	25	4	5	16	24	55	17

LEADING GOALSCORERS
25 Mateja Kezman (PSV)
21 Pierre Van Hooijdonk (Feyenoord)
14 Thomas Buffel (Feyenoord)

HUNGARY

Mar 7: Kispest-Honved 1 Dunaferr 0.
Mar 8: Siofok 0 MTK 1; Bekescsaba 0 Matav 5; Zalaegerszeg 2 Debrecen 1; Ferencvaros 1 Ujpest 0; Gyor 0 Videoton 4.
Mar 12: Videoton 3 Matav 2; Dunaferr 3 Bekescsaba 0; MTK 2 Kispest-Honved 1; Ujpest 1 Siofok 1; Debrecen 2 Ferencvaros 0; Gyor 1 Zalaegerszeg 1.
Mar 15: Bekescsaba 2 MTK 2; Matav 4 Dunaferr 1; Ferencvaros 5 Gyor 2; Siofok 1 Debrecen 1; Zalaegerszeg 0 Videoton 3.
Mar 16: Kispest-Honved 1 Ujpest 4.
Mar 21: MTK 0 Matav 0.
Mar 22: Videoton 3 Dunaferr 0; Ujpest 2 Bekescsaba 0; Debrecen 3 Kispest-Honved 2; Gyor 2 Siofok 2; Zalaegerszeg 1 Ferencvaros 1.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
MTK	21	14	4	3	39	18	46
Ferencvaros	21	14	3	4	40	17	45
Ujpest	21	11	4	6	44	29	37
Debrecen	21	9	9	3	41	30	36
Zalaegerszeg	21	8	6	7	37	35	30
Siofok	21	7	8	6	27	27	29
Gyor	21	8	5	8	33	35	29
Videoton	21	7	6	8	29	29	27
Matav	21	6	5	10	33	35	23
Dunaferr	21	4	5	12	25	40	17
Kispest-Honved	21	4	3	14	27	49	15
Bekescsaba	21	4	2	15	25	56	14

ITALY

Saturday, March 8

Bologna 1 (Cruz 23)
Inter 2 (Recoba 9, 85) Att: 31,432

Roma 1 (Cassano 89)
Lazio 1 (Stankovic 8) Att: 71,668

Sunday, March 9

Atalanta 0
Parma 0 Att: 14,994

Como 1 (Pecchia 54)
Brescia 1 (Toni 55) Att: 8,005

Empoli 3 (Grella 56, Tavano 68, Borriello 81)
Piacenza 1 (Hubner 89) Att: 5,960

Milan 0
Chievo 0 Att: 56,123

Modena 1 (Colucci 13)
Perugia 1 (Vryzas 33) Att: 13,194

Torino 1 (Ferrante pen 12)
Reggina 0 Att: 14,130

Udinese 0
Juventus 1 (Trezeguet 84) Att: 26,694

Saturday, March 15

Juventus 3 (Nedved 54, 83, Trezeguet 85)
Modena 0 Att: 36,921

Reggina 0
Milan 0 Att: 26,640

Sunday, March 16

Bologna 1 (Signori 7)
Udinese 0 Att: 21,821

Brescia 1 (Guardiola pen 58)
Torino 0 Att: 14,097

Chievo 0
Parma 4 (Mutu 4, Nakata 56, Lamouchi 62, Gilardino 88) Att: 13,983

Inter 4 (Batistuta 13, Di Biagio 24, Vieri 56, 76)
Como 0 Att: 61,967

Lazio 4 (Claudio Lopez 8, Corradi 40, Simeone 71, Castroman 84)
Empoli 1 (Busce 4) Att: 32,717

Perugia 1 (Miccoli 49)
Roma 0 Att: 11,099

Piacenza 2 (Hubner 38, De Cesare 82)
Atalanta 0 Att: 8,977

Saturday, March 22

Milan 2 (Shevchenko 4, Inzaghi 25)
Juventus 1 (Nedved 10) Att: 78,871

Modena 2 (Balestri 61, Sculli 89)
Reggina 1 (Savoldi 90) Att: 14,093

Sunday, March 23

Atalanta 1 (Dabo 52)
Chievo 0 Att: 14,796

Como 5 (Caccia 19, Amoruso 50, 87, Pecchia 55, Music 83)
Bologna 1 (Meghni 51) Att: 6,355

Empoli 0
Brescia 0 Att: 8,704

Parma 2 (Cardone 3, Adriano 90)
Lazio 1 (Stankovic 49) Att: 15,732

Roma 3 (Cassano 10, Delvecchio 33, Totti 42)
Piacenza 0 Att: 51,018

Torino 2 (Ferrante 59, 73)
Perugia 1 (Grosso 38) Att: 12,819

Udinese 2 (Jankulovski 49, Iaquinta 58)
Inter 1 (Cordoba 73) Att: 22,919

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	26	17	6	3	49	18	57
Inter	26	17	3	6	53	29	54
Milan	26	15	7	4	46	20	52
Lazio	26	11	12	3	45	27	45
Parma	26	11	9	6	45	29	42
Chievo	26	12	5	9	34	28	41
Udinese	26	11	6	9	27	27	39
Roma	26	9	8	9	40	34	35
Bologna	26	9	8	9	30	32	35
Perugia	26	9	7	10	32	35	34
Brescia	26	7	12	7	28	30	33
Modena	26	8	6	12	20	36	30
Empoli	26	7	7	12	30	39	28
Atalanta	26	6	10	10	27	37	28
Reggina	26	7	5	14	27	44	26
Como	26	3	10	13	22	42	19
Piacenza	26	5	4	17	23	45	19
Torino	26	4	7	15	18	44	19

LEADING GOALSCORERS
23 Christian Vieri (Inter)
14 Filippo Inzaghi (Milan)
13 Adrian Mutu (Parma)
13 Francesco Totti (Roma)

POLAND

Mar 14: Legia 4 Amica 3.
Mar 15: Groclin 2 Pogon 0; Garbarnia 3 KSZO 1; Lech 2 Odra 3; Widzew 2 Katowice 0; Wisla P 0 Polonia 1.
Mar 16: Zaglebie 1 Gornik 1; Ruch C 0 Wisla K 3.
Mar 18: Legia 0 Groclin 2.
Mar 19: Amica 1 Polonia 3; Katowice 2 Wisla P 0; Odra 5 Widzew 1; KSZO 1 Lech 3; Pogon 0 Zaglebie 1; Wisla K 2 Garbarnia 2; Gornik 0 Ruch C 0.
Mar 22: Amica 2 Wisla P 2; Polonia 1 Widzew 0; Katowice 1 Lech 0; Odra 4 Garbarnia 0; KSZO 0 Ruch C 2; Wisla K 4 Zaglebie 1; Pogon 0 Legia 4.
Mar 23: Gornik 0 Groclin 0.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wisla K	18	12	4	2	51	21	40
Katowice	18	12	2	4	24	11	38
Odra	18	11	4	3	35	22	37
Legia	18	10	6	2	34	19	36
Groclin	18	9	6	3	30	20	33
Gornik	18	6	7	5	27	19	25
Polonia	18	7	4	7	24	28	25
Ruch C	18	6	6	6	18	24	24
Amica	18	5	7	6	24	24	22
Wisla P	18	5	5	8	19	25	20
Garbarnia	18	5	5	8	29	37	20
Lech	18	4	7	7	21	23	19
Zaglebie	18	4	5	9	20	24	17
Widzew	18	3	6	9	16	29	15
KSZO	18	4	3	11	17	35	15
Pogon	18	1	3	14	11	39	6

PORTUGAL

Friday, March 14

Moreirense 3 (Demetrios 48, Vitor Pereira 68, Afonso Martins 80)
Belenenses 1 (Verona 24)

Saturday, March 15

Academica 1 (Dario 54)
Benfica 4 (Armando 11, Simao 16, Miguel 45, Joao Manuel Pinto 90)

Sunday, March 16

Pacos Ferreira 0
Maritimo 0

FC Porto 2 (Alenichev 18, Deco 81)
Uniao Leiria 0

Santa Clara 3 (Tucho 45, 83, Fonseca 76)
Beira Mar 1 (Ricardo Sousa pen 65)

Setubal 2 (Hugo Henrique 16, Meyong 78)
Nacional 2 (Rossato 12, Adriano 21)

Sporting Braga 0
Gil Vicente 0

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Jardel pen 6)
Boavista 1 (Jocivalter 20)

Monday, March 17

Varzim 0
Guimaraes 1 (Rafael 82)

Friday, March 21

Gil Vicente 1 (Luis Coentrao 41)
Sporting Lisbon 0

Saturday, March 22

Benfica 1 (Simao pen 60)
Santa Clara 0

Sunday, March 23

Beira Mar 3 (Joao Armando og 2, Fary 17, 60)
Pacos Ferreira 1 (Cadu 8)

Guimaraes 1 (Romeu 75)
Sporting Braga 1 (Castanheira 73)

Maritimo 2 (Eric Gaucho 34, 83)
Varzim 0

Setubal 0
Moreirense 2 (Vitor Pereira 18, Demetrios 82)

Uniao Leiria 0
Academica 0

Monday, March 24

Boavista 1 (Silva 42)
Belenenses 3 (Antchouet 52, Carlos Fernandes 75, Chico Silva 90)

Nacional 1 (Adriano 41)
FC Porto 2 (Derlei 77, Ricardo Carvalho 88)

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Porto	26	22	3	1	56	20	69
Benfica	26	17	5	4	54	19	56
Sporting Lisbon	26	15	4	7	40	27	49
Guimaraes	26	12	6	8	41	33	42
Gil Vicente	26	12	3	11	36	37	39
Uniao Leiria	26	9	8	9	36	37	35
Belenenses	26	9	7	10	35	37	34
Moreirense	26	7	10	9	33	34	31
Boavista	26	7	10	9	25	26	31
Pacos Ferreira	26	8	7	11	27	36	31
Maritimo	26	9	4	13	29	40	31
Sporting Braga	26	7	10	9	23	35	31
Nacional	26	7	9	10	29	34	30
Varzim	26	8	5	13	29	35	29
Santa Clara	26	6	9	11	31	39	27
Academica	26	6	8	12	27	39	26
Beira Mar	26	6	7	13	30	44	25
Setubal	26	4	11	11	28	37	23

LEADING GOALSCORER
16 Simao Sabrosa (Benfica)

PORTUGUESE CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 8/9: Pacos Ferreira 2 Setubal 1; FC Porto 7 Varzim 0; Sporting Lisbon 0 Naval 1° de Maio 1; Uniao Leiria 3 Academica 1.

ROMANIA

Mar 8: Dinamo 0 Astra 3; U Craiova 0 Bacau 0; Brasov 2 Arges 0; Otelul 0 Rapid 0; Sportul 1 Gloria 1; Farul 0 National 5; UTA 2 Ceahlaul 1.

Mar 9: Poli AEK 1 Steaua 3.
Mar 15: Ceahlaul 2 Astra 1; Bacau 3 Dinamo 1; Arges 5 Poli AEK 1; Rapid 1 Brasov 1; Gloria 1 Otelul 0; National 5 Sportul 1.
Mar 16: UTA 0 Farul 1; Steaua 0 U Craiova 0.
Mar 19: Arges 2 Otelul 2; Astra 2 U Craiova 0; Bacau 1 Poli AEK 0; Gloria 1 Farul 3; Ceahlaul 3 Dinamo 2; National 2 UTA 1; Rapid 0 Sportul 1; Steaua 1 Brasov 1.
Mar 22: Astra 2 Bacau 0; U Craiova 0 Arges 0; Poli AEK 1 Rapid 3; Brasov 0 Gloria 1; Otelul 2 National 1; Sportul 0 UTA 0; Farul 4 Ceahlaul 2.
Mar 23: Dinamo 2 Steaua 4.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid	19	14	2	3	40	14	44
National	19	10	3	6	32	19	33
Steaua	19	9	6	4	23	17	33
Gloria	19	8	5	6	23	17	29
Dinamo	19	9	2	8	34	29	29
Bacau	19	7	5	7	20	18	26
Astra	19	8	2	9	26	27	26
Brasov	19	7	5	7	21	22	26
Otelul	19	7	5	7	19	24	26
Farul	19	8	2	9	21	29	26
Ceahlaul	19	6	6	7	29	25	24
Arges	19	6	4	9	21	26	22
Sportul	19	6	4	9	23	29	22
Poli AEK	19	7	1	11	25	35	22
U Craiova	19	5	6	8	18	26	21
UTA	19	5	2	12	18	36	17

RUSSIA

Mar 15: Torpedo-Metallurg 0 Moscow Spartak 0; Kryliya Sovetov 3 Rotor 0; Torpedo Moscow 1 Rostov* 1; Uralan 1 Lokomotiv 2; Zenit 2 Saturn 1.
Mar 16: CSKA 4 Rubin 0; Spartak-Alaniya** 0 Dinamo 1; Shinnik 1 Chernomorets 1.
Mar 22: Lokomotiv 1 Zenit 2; Chernomorets 1 Uralan 1; Rubin 1 Torpedo-Metallurg 0; Rotor 1 CSKA 2.
Mar 23: Dinamo 2 Kryliya Sovetov 1; Rostov 1 Shinnik 1; Saturn 2 Torpedo Moscow 0; Moscow Spartak 1 Spartak-Alaniya 2.
**Formerly Rostselmash*
***Formerly Alaniya Vladikavkaz*

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Zenit	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Dinamo	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Kryliya Sovetov	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Saturn	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Lokomotiv	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Spartak-Alaniya	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Rubin	2	1	0	1	1	4	3
Chernomorets	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Rostov	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Shinnik	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Uralan	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Moscow Spartak	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Torpedo-Metallurg	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Torpedo Moscow	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Rotor	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

SCOTLAND

Saturday, March 8

Celtic 1 (Hartson 58)
Rangers 0 Att: 58,787

Dundee 2 (Wilkie 39, Milne 41)
Kilmarnock 2 (Canero 51, McSwegan 85) Att: 6,531

Livingston 1 (Rubio 61)
Hearts 1 (Stamp 8) Att: 7,531

Motherwell 0
Aberdeen 1 (Sheerin pen 7) Att: 5,636

Sunday, March 9

Dunfermline 0
Partick 0 Att: 4,746

Hibernian 1 (McManus 3)
Dundee Utd 1 (McIntyre 69) Att: 7,518

Saturday, March 15

Aberdeen 3 (Sheerin 57, 64, McGuire 80)
Dundee 3 (Lovell pen 16, Caballero 24, Wilkie 81) Att: 12,119

Dundee Utd 0
Livingston 1 (Andrews 87) Att: 6,247

Partick 0
Hibernian 1 (McManus 15) Att: 4,551

Sunday, March 16

Kilmarnock 1 (Boyd 81)
Dunfermline 1 (Shields og 59) Att: 4,021

Wednesday, March 19

Rangers 2 (Ferguson 18, Lovenkrands 46)
Motherwell 0 Att: 49,240

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	31	26	3	2	80	22	81
Celtic	29	24	3	2	73	19	75
Hearts	30	14	8	8	50	44	50
Kilmarnock	31	13	8	10	37	42	47
Dunfermline	31	12	5	14	45	55	41
Dundee	31	9	11	11	41	46	38
Hibernian	31	11	5	15	42	50	38
Livingston	31	8	7	16	38	46	31
Aberdeen	31	7	10	14	29	47	31
Partick	31	6	10	15	28	47	28
Dundee Utd	31	5	10	16	27	55	25
Motherwell	30	6	6	18	34	51	24

LEADING GOALSCORERS
24 Henrik Larsson (Celtic)
17 Stevie Crawford (Dunfermline)
17 John Hartson (Celtic)

SCOTTISH CUP – quarter-finals

Mar 22: Falkirk 1 Dundee 1; Stranraer 0 Motherwell 4.
Mar 23: Dunfermline 1 Rangers 1; Inverness Caledonian Thistle 1 Celtic 0.

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Mar 16 - Hampden Park, Glasgow
Celtic 1 (Larsson 57)
Rangers 2 (Caniggia 23, Lovenkrands 35)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 52,000. **Ref:** Clark
Sent off: Lennon (Celtic) 88min

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

Mar 5: Cukaricki 2 Sartid 2.
Mar 8: Rad 1 Sartid 0; Mogren 0 Zeleznik 0; Cukaricki 2 Red Star 1; Sutjeska 1 Zemun 0; Radnicki N 0 Partizan 4; Radnicki O 1 Rudar P 0; Hajduk K 0 Vojvodina 0; Javor 0 OFK 1; Zeta 1 Obilic 0.
Mar 11: Rudar P 1 Hajduk K 2.
Mar 19: Rad 4 Mogren 0; Sartid 0 Red Star 0; Zeleznik 3 Zemun 1; Cukaricki 1 Partizan 2; Sutjeska 1 Rudar P 0; Radnicki N 0 Vojvodina 3; Radnicki O 0 OFK 0; Hajduk K 0 Obilic 1; Javor 1 Zeta 4.
Mar 22: Javor 1 Rad 0; Zeta 0 Hajduk K 0; Obilic 1 Radnicki O 1; OFK 2 Radnicki N 1; Vojvodina 1 Sutjeska 0; Rudar P 1 Cukaricki 1; Partizan 3 Zeleznik 1; Zemun 1 Sartid 1.
Mar 23: Red Star 4 Mogren 1.

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	22	19	2	1	60	26	59
Red Star	22	13	5	4	47	16	44
OFK	22	13	3	6	38	24	42
Zeleznik	22	13	3	6	39	26	42
Vojvodina	22	12	3	7	36	22	39
Sutjeska	22	12	3	7	28	22	39
Zeta	22	10	5	7	29	24	35
Hajduk K	22	9	6	7	25	17	33
Obilic	22	9	6	7	27	20	33
Sartid	22	6	10	6	29	30	28
Zemun	22	8	4	10	28	29	28
Radnicki O	22	5	10	7	22	26	25
Cukaricki	22	7	4	11	30	38	25
Rad	22	6	6	10	25	31	24
Javor	22	6	3	13	13	32	21
Rudar P	22	3	5	14	13	39	14
Mogren	22	3	5	14	21	48	14
Radnicki N	22	1	3	18	14	54	6

SPAIN

Saturday, March 8

Barcelona 1 (Torres Gomez og 28)
Valladolid 1 (Bonano og 47) Att: 68,131

Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Diego Tristan pen 32, Victor 40)
Villarreal 1 (Jorge Lopez pen 11) Att: 26,000

Real Madrid 4 (Figo pen 13, Zidane 43, Portillo 77, Guti 87)
Racing Santander 1 (Nafti 48) Att: 70,000

Valencia 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Aguilera 72) Att: 50,000

Sunday, March 9

Malaga 3 (Dely Valdes 24, Manu 76, 85)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 27,000

Mallorca 2 (Pandiani pen 1, Lozano 50)
Betis 1 (Fernando 21) Att: 17,000

Rayo Vallecano 1 (De Quintana 86)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 13,000

Real Sociedad 3 (Kovacevic 16, Nihat 38, Karpin 43)
Alaves 1 (Ruben Navarro pen 84) Att: 27,000

Recreativo 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 18,000

Sevilla 2 (Antonio 19, Reyes pen 37)
Osasuna 0 Att: 45,000

Saturday, March 15

Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Makaay pen 18, Naybet 86)
Rayo Vallecano 0 Att: 25,000

Racing Santander 1 (Benayoun 4)
Real Sociedad 2 (Nihat 22, Karpin 60) Att: 15,236

Villarreal 0
Real Madrid 1 (Ivan Helguera 90) Att: 23,000

Sunday, March 16

Alaves 0
Barcelona 0 Att: 19,457

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Etxeberria 39)
Valencia 0 Att: 32,400

Atletico Madrid 0
Celta Vigo 1 (Berizzo 87) Att: 55,000

Betis 1 (Capi 10)
Recreativo 1 (Xisco 62) Att: 35,000

Espanyol 2 (Tamudo 53, pen 90)
Malaga 1 (Manu 78) Att: 21,800

Osasuna 0
Mallorca 0 Att: 15,090

Valladolid 0
Sevilla 0 Att: 15,000

Saturday, March 22

Rayo Vallecano 0
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 15,000

Sunday, March 23

Barcelona 6 (Kluivert 1, 29, Riquelme 7, Overmars 79, 82, Mendieta pen 90)
Racing Santander 1 (Javi Guerrero 48) Att: 68,351

Celta Vigo 2 (Hossam 19, McCarthy 77)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Del Horno 7) Att: 16,000

Malaga 0
Betis 0 Att: 17,000

Mallorca 2 (Pandiani 53, Riera 57)
Valladolid 1 (Jonathan 45) Att: 14,000

Real Madrid 2 (Zidane 45, Ronaldo 50)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 74,000

Real Sociedad 2 (Kovacevic 26, pen 73)
Villarreal 2 (Victor 89, Jorge Lopez 90) Att: 28,000

Recreativo 1 (Pernia 84)
Osasuna 1 (Aloisi 50) Att: 18,000

Sevilla 3 (Javi Casquero 21, Reyes pen 85, Karmona og 90)
Alaves 2 (Ruben Navarro 60, Astudillo 78) Att: 40,000

Valencia 1 (Baraja 59)
Espanyol 1 (David Garcia 8) Att: 45,600

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	27	16	9	2	61	26	57
Real Sociedad	27	15	9	3	47	34	54
Dep La Coruna	27	15	6	6	43	29	51
Valencia	27	13	8	6	42	21	47
Celta Vigo	27	13	5	9	33	24	44
Atletico Madrid	27	10	9	8	38	33	39
Sevilla	27	10	9	8	24	20	39
Betis	27	10	8	9	37	38	38
Barcelona	27	9	9	9	44	34	36
Mallorca	27	10	5	12	30	42	35
Athletic Bilbao	27	9	6	12	39	46	33
Malaga	27	7	11	9	34	33	32
Valladolid	27	9	5	13	27	31	32
Villarreal	27	8	8	11	27	33	32
Espanyol	27	8	6	13	29	36	30
Osasuna	27	7	9	11	27	34	30
Racing Santander	27	9	2	16	33	43	29
Alaves	27	7	8	12	31	50	29
Rayo Vallecano	27	7	5	15	24	40	26
Recreativo	27	5	9	13	26	49	24

LEADING GOALSCORERS
20 Roy Makaay (Deportivo La Coruna)
15 Darko Kovacevic (Real Sociedad)
14 Nihat Kahveci (Real Sociedad)
14 Ronaldo (Real Madrid)

SWITZERLAND

CHAMPIONSHIP POOL

Mar 8: Wil 1900 1 Grasshopper 3; Basle 2 Servette 0.
Mar 9: Zurich 1 Neuchatel Xamax 1; Young Boys 1 Thun 0.
Mar 15: Thun 1 Basle 4; Neuchatel Xamax 3 Wil 1900 0.
Mar 16: Grasshopper 2 Zurich 0; Servette 1 Young Boys 1.
Mar 22: Wil 1900 1 Servette 1; Young Boys 3 Neuchatel Xamax 1; Basle 2 Grasshopper 2.
Mar 23: Zurich 1 Thun 1.
Mar 26: Servette 2 Zurich 1.

SWITZERLAND – CHAMPIONSHIP POOL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Grasshopper	4	3	1	0	11	3	35 [25]
Basle	4	2	1	1	9	6	31 [24]
Neuchatel X	4	2	1	1	8	5	23 [16]
Young Boys	4	2	1	1	5	6	22 [15]
Servette	4	1	2	1	4	5	20 [15]
Zurich	4	0	2	2	3	6	18 [16]
Thun	4	0	2	2	3	7	18 [16]
Wil 1900	4	0	2	2	3	8	18 [16]

Teams carried forward half their points (figure in brackets) from regular season

TURKEY

Mar 7: Gaziantepspor 1 Adanaspor 1.
Mar 8: Denizlispor 1 Altay 1; Malatyaspor 1 Elazigspor 1; Galatasaray 2 Fenerbahce 0; Goztepe 0 Samsunspor 0.
Mar 9: Diyarbakirspor 4 Bursaspor 0; Istanbulspor 2 Kocaelispor 1; Trabzonspor 1 Besiktas 1; Ankaragucu 0 Genclerbirligi 1.
Mar 14: Genclerbirligi 2 Gaziantepspor 1.
Mar 15: Adanaspor 2 Denizlispor 1; Elazigspor 3 Fenerbahce 3; Istanbulspor 1 Galatasaray 2; Samsunspor 1 Trabzonspor 3.
Mar 16: Besiktas 1 Ankaragucu 0; Kocaelispor 1 Diyarbakirspor 1; Bursaspor 1 Goztepe 0; Altay 0 Malatyaspor 2.
Mar 19: Galatasaray 0 Denizlispor 1; Kocaelispor 0 Bursaspor 0; Gaziantepspor 4 Elazigspor 0.
Mar 22: Malatyaspor 1 Adanaspor 0; Fenerbahce 0 Altay 1; Diyarbakirspor 1 Istanbulspor 1; Ankaragucu 3 Samsunspor 2.
Mar 23: Gaziantepspor 1 Besiktas 1; Trabzonspor 3 Bursaspor 0; Galatasaray 3 Elazigspor 0; Denizlispor 1 Genclerbirligi 3; Goztepe 1 Kocaelispor 2.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Besiktas	24	17	7	0	46	15	58
Galatasaray	25	18	3	4	42	20	57
Genclerbirligi	25	17	5	3	61	25	56
Trabzonspor	25	12	8	5	38	21	44
Fenerbahce	24	12	7	5	46	27	43
Gaziantepspor	25	10	9	6	41	28	39
Malatyaspor	25	10	8	7	39	31	38
Ankaragucu	25	10	3	12	31	32	33
Denizlispor	24	8	7	9	27	28	31
Diyarbakirspor	24	7	7	10	27	32	28
Istanbulspor	25	7	5	13	29	39	26
Samsunspor	25	7	5	13	27	44	26
Altay	25	7	5	13	30	49	26
Adanaspor	25	5	8	12	24	41	23
Bursaspor	25	5	8	12	27	47	23
Elazigspor	25	5	7	13	24	42	22
Goztepe	25	4	9	12	23	41	21
Kocaelispor	25	5	3	17	24	44	18

UKRAINE

Mar 9: Olexandria* 0 Obolon 0; Karpaty 3 Tavriya 1; Arsenal 0 Metalurh Z 0; Metalist 0 Shakhtar 1; Chornomorets 2 Volyn-1 0; Illichivets** 2 Kryvbas 0; Metalurh D 2 Vorskla 0; Dnipro 2 Dynamo 2.
Mar 16: Volyn-1 2 Illichivets 1; Dynamo 2 Chernomorets 0; Shakhtar 2 Dnipro 0; Vorskla 2 Olexandria 1; Kryvbas 0 Metalurh D 2; Metalurh Z 2 Metalist 0; Tavriya 1 Arsenal 0.
Mar 17: Obolon 2 Karpaty 1.
Mar 23: Metalurh D 2 Volyn-1 1; Metalist 1 Tavriya 0; Illichivets 0 Dynamo 1; Olexandria 0 Kryvbas 0; Obolon 1 Vorskla 0; Karpaty 1 Arsenal 2; Dnipro 1 Metalurh Z 0; Chornomorets 2 Shakhtar 0.
**Formerly Poligraftekhnika*
***Formerly Metalurh Mariupol*

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shakhtar	18	14	2	2	34	14	44
Dynamo	18	12	4	2	38	11	40
Dnipro	18	12	3	3	27	12	39
Arsenal	18	11	4	3	40	15	37
Metalurh D	18	11	4	3	27	14	37
Volyn-1	18	8	2	8	24	29	26
Obolon	18	5	5	8	17	21	20
Olexandria	18	4	8	6	18	24	20
Tavriya	18	6	2	10	19	29	20
Illichivets	18	5	4	9	21	25	19
Kryvbas	18	4	7	7	14	19	19
Metalist	18	5	4	9	11	23	19
Karpaty	18	4	6	8	17	21	18
Metalurh Z	18	3	5	10	11	25	14
Chornomorets	18	4	2	12	13	28	14
Vorskla	18	4	2	12	10	31	14

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

1st rnd

Group 1

Mar 11 - Cali
Deportivo Cali (Col) 1 (Hernandez 34)
Libertad (Par) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Brand (Ven)

Mar 13 - Guayaquil
Emelec (Ecu) 3 (Pacheco 60, Rey 78, Tenorio 87)
River Plate (Arg) 1 (Fuertes 39)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rezende (Bra)
Sent off: Rojas (River) 35min

Mar 18 - Guayaquil
Emelec 1 (Cuero 4)
Libertad 5 (Bonet 38, 87, Santos 45, 60, Fernandez 80)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Paniagua (Bol)
Sent off: Sanchez (Emelec) 36min; Santos (Libertad) 76min

Mar 20 - Buenos Aires
River Plate 2 (Cavenaghi 36, Coudet 70)
Deportivo Cali 1 (Castillo 27)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Simon (Bra)
Sent off: Ahumada (River) 69min; Murillo (Dep Cali) 69min

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Deportivo Cali	4	3	0	1	8	2	9
River Plate	4	2	0	2	6	7	6
Libertad	4	1	1	2	8	7	4
Emelec	4	1	1	2	6	12	4

Tue, Apr 1: Deportivo Cali v Emelec
Wed, Apr 9: Libertad v River Plate
Thu, Apr 17: Libertad v Deportivo Cali
Thu, Apr 17: River Plate v Emelec

Group 2

Mar 11 - Belem
Paysandu (Bra) 3 (Robson pen 45, 82, Velber 48)
Universidad Catolica (Chl) 1 (Alvarez 11)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Russi (Col)

Mar 12 - Lima
Sporting Cristal (Per) 1 (Soto 39)
Cerro Porteno (Par) 1 (Salcedo 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Reinoso (Ecu)
Sent off: Salcedo (Cerro Porteno) 87min

Mar 18 - Santiago
Universidad Catolica 2 (Gioino 53, Campos 70)
Cerro Porteno 1 (J M Nunez 81)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)

Mar 18 - Belem
Paysandu 2 (Robson 14, Jorginho 33)
Sporting Cristal 1 (Moisela 53)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Paneso (Col)
Sent off: C A Zegarra (Sporting Cristal) 84min

Mar 27 - Asuncion
Cerro Porteno 2 (Barreto 43, Salcedo 77)
Paysandu 6 (Velber 32, 52, Robson pen 61, 87, Iarley 75, 89)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Martin (Arg)
Sent off: Achucarro (Cerro Porteno) 84min

Mar 27 - Lima
Sporting Cristal 3 (Maestri 34, 59, Julinho 62)
Universidad Catolica 1 (Ormazabal 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Paneso (Col)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paysandu	5	4	1	0	13	4	13
Sporting Cristal	5	2	1	2	6	6	7
Cerro Porteno	5	1	2	2	7	11	5
U Catolica	5	1	0	4	6	11	3

Tue, Apr 15: Cerro Porteno v Sporting Cristal
Tue, Apr 15: Universidad Catolica v Paysandu

Group 3

Mar 12 - Quito
El Nacional (Ecu) 0
Santos (Bra) 0
Ref: Hidalgo (Per)

Mar 19 - Quito
El Nacional 1 (Grueso 90)
12 de Octubre (Par) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Aguilera (Bol)

Mar 19 - Santos
Santos 3 (Diego 2, Robinho 24, Ricardo Oliveira 77)
America (Col) 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Gimenez (Arg)

Mar 25 - Asuncion
12 de Octubre 1 (Monzon 82)
Santos 4 (Robinho 2, Diego 37, Nene 77, Ricardo Oliveira 86)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)
Sent off: Arviginaldez (12 de Octubre) 88min

Mar 27 - Cali
America 1 (Banguero 61)
El Nacional 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	5	4	1	0	15	3	13
America	5	2	1	2	7	10	7
El Nacional	5	1	2	2	3	5	5
12 de Octubre	5	1	0	4	6	13	3

Wed, Apr 16: 12 de Octubre v America
Wed, Apr 16: Santos v El Nacional

Group 4

Mar 19 - La Plata
Gimnasia LP (Arg) 0
Cobreloa (Chl) 0
Ref: Souza (Bra)

Mar 20 - Asuncion
Olimpia (Par) 0
Alianza Lima (Per) 1 (Tagliani 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Oliveira (Bra)

Mar 25 - Calama
Cobreloa 2 (Diaz 9, Martel pen 15)
Olimpia 3 (Gaglione 19, Lopez 37, Baez 70)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Simon (Bra)
Sent off: M A Benitez (Olimpia) 90min

Mar 26 - Lima
Alianza Lima 1 (Olcese 10)
Gimnasia LP 1 (E Gonzalez 62)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)
Sent off: Pautasso (Gimnasia) 37min

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gimnasia LP	5	1	4	0	7	3	7
Olimpia	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Cobreloa	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Alianza Lima	5	1	2	2	6	10	5

Tue, Apr 8: Cobreloa v Alianza Lima
Tue, Apr 8: Olimpia v Gimnasia LP

Group 5

Mar 11 - Montevideo
Penarol (Uru) 2 (Estoyanoff 31, De Souza 59)
Pumas UNAM (Mex) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gonzalez (Par)

Mar 13 - Porto Alegre
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Caio 10)
Bolivar (Bol) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Baldassi (Arg)

Mar 18 - Montevideo
Penarol 4 (Cedres 30, 66, Canobbio 39, 57)
Bolivar 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Aros (Chl)
Sent off: Pizarro (Bolivar) 88min

Mar 20 - Mexico City
Pumas UNAM 1 (A Gonzalez 79)
Gremio 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)

Mar 26 - La Paz
Bolivar 2 (Gutierrez 1, Sandy 65)
Pumas UNAM 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Reinoso (Ecu)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol	4	2	1	1	10	7	7
Gremio	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Bolivar	5	2	0	3	7	9	6
Pumas UNAM	5	2	0	3	5	7	6

Wed, Apr 2: Gremio v Penarol
Thu, Apr 10: Bolivar v Gremio
Thu, Apr 10: Pumas UNAM v Penarol

Group 6

Mar 12 - Avellaneda
Racing Club (Arg) 2 (Rueda 6, Orozco 56)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

Mar 19 - Montevideo
Nacional (Uru) 2 (Vanzini 1, Guerrero 43)
Universitario (Per) 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Aquino (Par)

Mar 25 - Avellaneda
Racing Club 1 (Mirosevic 29)
Universitario 1 (Artigas 30)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Selman (Chl)
Sent off: Estevez (Racing) 59min

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing Club	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Nacional	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Universitario	4	1	2	1	4	4	5
Oriente	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Tue, Apr 1: Nacional v Oriente Petrolero
Tue, Apr 8: Oriente Petrolero v Universitario

Wed, Apr 9: Racing Club v Nacional
Wed, Apr 16: Oriente Petrolero v Racing Club
Wed, Apr 16: Universitario v Nacional

Group 7

Mar 13 - Santiago
Colo Colo (Chl) 1 (Quinteros 17)
Barcelona (Ecu) 1 (Brizuela 86)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Viera (Uru)
Sent off: Madrid (Colo Colo) 90min

Mar 26 - Medellin
Independiente Medellin (Col) 1 (Montoya 89)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
Indep Medellin	4	2	0	2	3	4	6
Barcelona	4	1	1	2	4	4	4
Colo Colo	4	1	1	2	4	6	4

Thu, Apr 3: Boca Juniors v Colo Colo
Thu, Apr 3: Barcelona v Independiente Medellin
Thu, Apr 10: Independiente Medellin v Colo Colo
Thu, Apr 10: Barcelona v Boca Juniors

Group 8

Mar 11 - Sao Paulo
Corinthians (Bra) 4 (Rogerio 14, Anderson 31, Jorge Wagner 58, Liedson 71)
The Strongest (Bol) 1 (Ledezma 17)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Sequeira (Arg)

Mar 20 - Montevideo
Fenix (Uru) 2 (Hornos 25, 73)
The Strongest 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Sent off: Castellano (Fenix) 84min

Mar 26 - Mexico City
Cruz Azul (Mex) 3 (Campos 6, Cacho 45, Palencia 65)
Corinthians 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Hidalgo (Per)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians	4	3	0	1	7	5	9
Fenix	4	2	0	2	9	4	6
Cruz Azul	4	2	0	2	7	9	6
The Strongest	4	1	0	3	4	9	3

Wed, Apr 2: Corinthians v Fenix
Thu, Apr 3: The Strongest v Cruz Azul
Wed, Apr 9: Cruz Azul v Fenix
Wed, Apr 9: The Strongest v Corinthians

Top two from each group qualify for second round

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, March 7

Huracan 2 (Cabrol pen 41, Villa 56)
Colon Santa Fe 3 (Blanco 8, Martinez 61, Belloso 90)

Saturday, March 8

Arsenal 1 (S Gonzalez pen 45)
Velez Sarsfield 0

Banfield 1 (Sanguinetti 9)
San Lorenzo 1 (Chatruc 26)

Rosario Central 2 (Delgado 24, Aguirre og 65)
Olimpo 1 (Castillo 52)

Sunday, March 9

Estudiantes 0
Boca Juniors 2 (Angeleri og 3, Villarreal 7)

Independiente 1 (Silvera 63)
Racing Club 1 (Milito 11)

Nueva Chicago 4 (Serrano 50, Amaya 55, Carreno 71, 82)
Gimnasia LP 1 (Sanguinetti pen 29)

River Plate 2 (C Husain 45, Ameli 90)
Chacarita Juniors 1 (Pena pen 25)

Talleres Cordoba 1 (Gandolfi 29)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Union Santa Fe 1 (Mosset 30)
Lanus 1 (Risso 43)

Friday, March 14

Velez Sarsfield 0
Talleres Cordoba 0

Saturday, March 15

Chacarita Juniors 3 (Delgado 5, 88, Astudillo 74)
Huracan 0

Gimnasia LP 2 (Gonzalez 22, Turienzo 90)
Union Santa Fe 1 (N Fernandez 65)

Newell's Old Boys 2 (Domizi 30, M Rosales 54)
Independiente 2 (Dominguez og 33, Pusineri 44)

Sunday, March 16

Colon Santa Fe 0
Arsenal 0

Lanus 0
Banfield 1 (Rodriguez 67)

Olimpo 0
Nueva Chicago 3 (Carreno 45, Tilger 69, Santana 90)

Racing Club 2 (Mirosevic 19, Gonzalez 47)
Rosario Central 2 (Delgado 46, 52)

River Plate 1 (D Husain 63)
Estudiantes 0

San Lorenzo 1 (Luna 80)
Boca Juniors 2 (Villarreal 51, Rodriguez 64)

Friday, March 21

Estudiantes 4 (Paredes og 11, Aquino 28, Maggiolo 37, Farias 80)
San Lorenzo 1 (Saja pen 22)

Saturday, March 22

Banfield 0
Gimnasia LP 1 (Choy 2)

Nueva Chicago 0
Racing Club 5 (Gonzalez 47, Rueda 57, 68, Milito 72, Amarilla 90)

Rosario Central 3 (Figueroa 39, Messera 58, Delgado 84)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Sunday, March 23

Arsenal 0
Chacarita Juniors 0

Boca Juniors 3 (Tevez 4, Donnet 17, E Gonzalez 35)
Lanus 1 (Moreno 45)

Huracan 0
River Plate 6 (Cavenaghi 51, 52, D Husain 62, Fuertes 77, D'Alessandro 79, Barrado 85)

Independiente 1 (Insua pen 57)
Velez Sarsfield 3 (Nanni 9, 15, Bardaro 58)

Talleres Cordoba 0
Colon Santa Fe 0

Union Santa Fe 1 (Gimenez 67)
Olimpo 2 (Castillo 46, Laspada pen 90)

ARGENTINA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	6	5	0	1	12	5	15
Rosario Central	6	4	2	0	14	5	14
Racing Club	6	4	2	0	12	3	14
River Plate	6	4	1	1	13	4	13
Velez Sarsfield	6	4	1	1	7	2	13
Olimpo	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Nueva Chicago	6	3	1	2	11	11	10
Gimnasia LP	6	3	1	2	8	10	10
Estudiantes	6	3	0	3	7	6	9
Colon Santa Fe	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Union Santa Fe	6	2	2	2	9	7	8
Newell's OB	6	1	3	2	7	9	6
Arsenal	6	1	3	2	2	4	6
Talleres Cordoba	6	1	3	2	2	5	6
Chacarita Jnrs	6	1	2	3	4	4	5
Banfield	6	1	2	3	5	9	5
Lanus	6	1	1	4	4	8	4
San Lorenzo	6	0	3	3	7	13	3
Independiente	6	0	2	4	4	13	2
Huracan	6	0	1	5	3	16	1

LEADING GOALSCORERS
5 Cesar Delgado (Rosario Central)
5 Luciano Figueroa (Rosario Central)
5 Roberto Nanni (Velez Sarsfield)
4 Diego Milito (Racing Club)

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 7: Union Central 1 The Strongest 1.
Mar 8: Bolivar 4 Jorge Wilstermann 0.
Mar 9: Aurora 1 Real Potosi 1; Blooming 1 Guabira 0; Iberoamericana 4 Independiente 0; San Jose 2 Oriente 1.
Mar 14: Jorge Wilstermann 5 Iberoamericana 0.
Mar 15: The Strongest 4 Aurora 3.
Mar 16: Blooming 4 San Jose 2; Guabira 2 Union Central 2.
Mar 21: Iberoamericana 5 Real Potosi 0.
Mar 22: San Jose 3 Independiente 0.
Mar 23: Aurora 0 Guabira 0; Bolivar 0 The Strongest 0; Oriente 2 Jorge Wilstermann 3; Union Central 3 Blooming 1.

BOLIVIA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iberoamericana	3	2	0	1	9	5	6
J Wilstermann	3	2	0	1	8	6	6
San Jose	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Blooming	3	2	0	1	6	5	6
Union Central	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
The Strongest	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Bolivar	2	1	1	0	4	0	4
Aurora	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Guabira	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Real Potosi	2	0	1	1	1	6	1
Oriente	2	0	0	2	3	5	0
Independiente	2	0	0	2	0	7	0

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 7: Audax Italiano 2 U Catolica 1.
Mar 8: Santiago Wanderers 0 Cobreloa 1; San Felipe 2 Union Espanola 2; Dep Temuco 1 Rangers 1.
Mar 9: Huachipato 2 U de Chile 2; Colo Colo 1 U de Concepcion 1; Cobresal 1 Palestino 0; Puerto Montt 1 Coquimbo Unido 1.
Mar 15: U Catolica 4 Union Espanola 2; Rangers 1 Huachipato 1; Cobreloa 2 Puerto Montt 0; Santiago Wanderers 1 San Felipe 1; Palestino 1 Audax Italiano 5.
Mar 16: U de Chile 0 Colo Colo 0; U de Concepcion 1 Cobresal 2; Coquimbo Unido 1 Dep Temuco 2.
Mar 21: Audax Italiano 2 U de Concepcion 1.
Mar 22: Union Espanola 1 Palestino 2; Dep Temuco 3 Cobreloa 1; San Felipe 1 U Catolica 3.
Mar 23: Huachipato 3 Coquimbo Unido 1; Cobresal 3 U de Chile 3; Puerto Montt 2 Santiago Wanderers 1; Colo Colo 1 Rangers 1.

CHILE – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cobreloa	7	5	1	1	13	5	16
Huachipato	7	2	3	2	13	11	9
Palestino	7	2	0	5	9	14	6
Union Espanola	7	1	1	5	9	19	4

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Puerto Montt	7	3	2	2	8	10	11
U de Chile	7	2	4	1	17	11	10
Coquimbo Unido	7	1	2	4	6	11	5
San Felipe	7	1	2	4	6	15	5

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Audax Italiano	7	6	0	1	22	11	18
Cobresal	7	3	2	2	12	8	11
Rangers	7	1	6	0	11	7	9
Sant Wanderers	7	2	2	3	12	12	8

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	7	3	4	0	13	7	13
U Catolica	7	3	3	1	13	9	12
Dep Temuco	7	2	2	3	7	15	8
U de Concepcion	7	1	2	4	7	13	5

COLOMBIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 26: Envigado 2 Millonarios 0.
Mar 5: Quindio 1 Once Caldas 2; Centauros 2 Tolima 1; At Junior 2 Dep Cali 0.
Mar 7: Dep Cali 4 Indep Santa Fe 2.
Mar 9: Dep Pasto 0 Bucaramanga 0; Tolima 2 Pereira 0; Quindio 1 Tulua 0; Magdalena 1 At Nacional 0; Millonarios 0 At Huila 0; Once Caldas 3 Centauros 0; Envigado 2 America 3.
Mar 12: Tolima 2 America 0; Indep Medellin 1 At Nacional 2.
Mar 16: At Junior 1 Quindio 0; Centauros 1 Envigado 1; Dep Cali 3 Dep Pasto 1; Bucaramanga 3 Tolima 0; At Nacional 0 Millonarios 0; Pereira 2 Indep Medellin 1; Tulua 2 Magdalena 3; At Huila 1 Once Caldas 3; Indep Santa Fe 0 America 1.
Mar 19: At Huila 1 Indep Medellin 0.
Mar 23: Once Caldas 2 Pereira 0; Bucaramanga 1 Envigado 0; America 2 Dep Cali 0; Centauros 1 Dep Pasto 1; At Huila 2 Tolima 2; At Nacional 0 Indep Medellin 1; Tulua 1 Quindio 1; At Junior 2 Magdalena 1; Indep Santa Fe 0 Millonarios 2.

COLOMBIA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Once Caldas	9	6	2	1	14	5	20
America	9	6	1	2	20	13	19
At Junior	8	6	0	2	10	6	18
Bucaramanga	9	4	5	0	14	7	17
Dep Cali	9	4	2	3	15	13	14
Millonarios	9	3	5	1	10	6	14
Centauros	9	3	5	1	10	9	14
At Nacional	9	4	1	4	8	6	13
Tolima	9	3	2	4	11	11	11
Envigado	9	3	2	4	8	9	11
Magdalena	9	3	1	5	13	17	10
At Huila	9	2	4	3	10	13	10
Dep Pasto	9	2	3	4	6	9	9
Pereira	9	2	3	4	11	15	9
Indep Santa Fe	9	2	3	4	7	12	9
Indep Medellin	8	2	1	5	10	11	7
Tulua	9	1	4	4	6	12	7
Quindio	9	1	2	6	6	15	5

ECUADOR

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 2: Espoli 0 El Nacional 1.
Mar 8: El Nacional 2 Dep Cuenca 0; Espoli 3 Emelec 0; LDU Quito 2 Tecnico Universitario 2; Manta 2 Dep Quito 1.
Mar 9: Barcelona 2 Aucas 0.
Mar 14: Dep Cuenca 2 LDU Quito 3.
Mar 15: Emelec 1 Dep Quito 1.
Mar 16: Tecnico Universitario 2 Barcelona 6; Aucas 4 Manta 0
Mar 23: Dep Quito 1 Aucas 0; LDU Quito 2 Espoli 2; El Nacional 4 Emelec 0; Manta 2 Tecnico Universitario 1; Barcelona 3 Dep Cuenca 0.
Mar 25: Dep Quito 4 Barcelona 1 (last 57mins of game abandoned on Mar 2).

ECUADOR – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Nacional	4	4	0	0	8	1	12
Barcelona	4	3	0	1	12	6	9
LDU Quito	4	2	2	0	9	7	8
Dep Quito	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
Manta	4	2	0	2	4	8	6
Espoli	4	1	1	2	6	7	4
Emelec	4	1	1	2	3	8	4
Aucas	4	1	0	3	5	5	3
Dep Cuenca	4	1	0	3	7	9	3
Tecnico Univ	4	0	1	3	5	11	1

PARAGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 7: Libertad 2 San Lorenzo 0.
Mar 8: Sportivo Luqueno 0 Cerro Porteno 1.
Mar 9: Guarani 4 Sport Colombia 2; Tacuary 1 Sol de America 0; 12 de Octubre 0 Olimpia 2.
Mar 15: Olimpia 1 Tacuary 4.
Mar 16: San Lorenzo 2 Sportivo Luqueno 4; Sol de America 3 Guarani 0.
Mar 22: Libertad 1 Sol de America 1; Guarani 3 Olimpia 3; 12 de Octubre 1 Sportivo Luqueno 1.
Mar 23: Sport Colombia 4 San Lorenzo 2; Tacuary 2 Cerro Porteno 3.

PARAGUAY – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	5	4	1	0	10	2	13
Olimpia	6	3	2	1	12	9	11
Guarani	6	3	1	2	13	13	10
Sol de America	6	2	3	1	7	3	9
Tacuary	6	3	0	3	11	10	9
Cerro Porteno	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Sport Colombia	5	2	0	3	11	13	6
Sportivo Luqueno	6	1	2	3	6	8	5
12 de Octubre	5	1	2	2	6	9	5
San Lorenzo	5	0	0	5	6	15	0

PERU

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 8: Sport Boys 3 Sporting Cristal 2; Coronel Bolognesi 2 Estudiantes 1; At Universidad 1 Dep Wanka 0.
Mar 9: Alianza Lima 1 Universitario 0; Cienciano 2 Melgar 1; Alianza Atletico 2 Union Huaral 2.
Mar 15: Alianza Lima 3 Union Huaral 0; Sporting Cristal 1 Cienciano 0.
Mar 16: Coronel Bolognesi 2 At Universidad 2; Melgar 1 Sport Boys 2; Alianza Atletico 1 Universitario 1; Dep Wanka 3 Estudiantes 1.
Mar 23: Sport Boys 2 Alianza Lima 2; Cienciano 0 Alianza Atletico 0; Estudiantes 0 Sporting Cristal 1; Union Huaral 2 Dep Wanka 1; At Universidad 3 Melgar 0.

PERU – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Alianza Lima	4	3	1	0	8	2	10
Sporting Cristal	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
At Universidad	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Cienciano	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Sport Boys	4	2	1	1	9	8	7
Union Huaral	4	2	1	1	7	8	7
Coronel Bolognesi	3	1	1	1	4	5	4
Alianza Atletico	4	0	3	1	4	6	3
Dep Wanka	4	1	0	3	4	6	3
Estudiantes	4	1	0	3	5	8	3
Melgar	4	1	0	3	5	8	3
Universitario	3	0	1	2	2	5	1

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 7: Defensor 1 Plaza 0.
Mar 8: Tacuarembo 3 River Plate 0; Penarol 4 Juventud 1.
Mar 9: Dep Colonia 1 Nacional 2; Wanderers 4 Liverpool 2; Bella Vista M 0 Miramar Misiones 4; Danubio 6 Villa Espanola 1; Cerro 2 Dep Maldonado 0; Central Espanol 2 Fenix 1.
Mar 15: Plaza 0 Nacional 1; Penarol 0 Wanderers 2.
Mar 16: Defensor 3 Dep Colonia 0; Central Espanol 1 Tacuarembo 1; River Plate 0 Fenix 2; Danubio 1 Liverpool 3; Dep Maldonado 3 Miramar Misiones 1; Villa Espanola 1 Bella Vista M 2; Cerro 2 Juventud 0.
Mar 21: Defensor 2 Central Espanol 0.
Mar 22: Dep Colonia 2 Tacuarembo 1; Bella Vista M 6 Juventud 0; Danubio 3 Penarol 2.
Mar 23: Nacional 1 Wanderers 0; Liverpool 2 River Plate 2; Miramar Misiones 1 Fenix 2; Dep Maldonado 1 Villa Espanola 1; Plaza 1 Cerro 1.

URUGUAY – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	5	4	1	0	6	2	13
Danubio	5	4	0	1	15	6	12
Fenix	5	4	0	1	11	6	12
Cerro	5	3	2	0	6	1	11
Wanderers	5	3	1	1	10	6	10
Defensor	5	3	0	2	9	5	9
Penarol	5	3	0	2	10	7	9
Tacuarembo	5	2	2	1	9	4	8
Bella Vista M	5	2	2	1	9	6	8
Dep Maldonado	5	2	2	1	6	4	8
Miramar Misiones	5	2	1	2	10	5	7
Liverpool	5	1	2	2	7	10	5
River Plate	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Central Espanol	5	1	1	3	3	9	4
Dep Colonia	5	1	0	4	3	12	3
Plaza	5	0	1	4	2	8	1
Villa Espanola	5	0	1	4	5	13	1
Juventud	5	0	1	4	1	14	1

VENEZUELA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 9: Carabobo 0 Ital-Chacao 1; Caracas 0 Mineros Guayana 0; Monagas 2 Estudiantes 3; Trujillanos 1 Dep Tachira 1.
Mar 12: Maracaibo 0 Trujillanos 0; Dep Tachira 2 Monagas 0; Estudiantes 0 Caracas 0; Mineros Guayana 5 Carabobo 3.
Mar 15: Monagas 0 Maracaibo 2.
Mar 16: Mineros Guayana 0 Ital-Chacao 0; Carabobo 0 Estudiantes 0; Caracas 0 Dep Tachira 0.
Mar 19: Ital-Chacao 1 Trujillanos 1; Maracaibo 0 Caracas 0; Carabobo 1 Dep Tachira 1; Estudiantes 3 Mineros Guayana 1.
Mar 23: Estudiantes 2 Ital-Chacao 2; Mineros Guayana 3 Dep Tachira 1; Carabobo 1 Maracaibo 2; Monagas 1 Trujillanos 2.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Estudiantes	6	3	3	0	12	6	12
Maracaibo	5	2	3	0	6	3	9
Mineros Guayana	6	2	2	2	9	8	8
Ital-Chacao	5	1	4	0	6	5	7
Dep Tachira	5	1	3	1	5	5	6
Trujillanos	5	1	3	1	5	7	6
Caracas	5	0	5	0	0	0	5
Carabobo	6	0	3	3	5	9	3
Monagas	5	1	0	4	4	9	3
Nacional	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 6: Pumas UNAM 3 Jaguares 1.
Mar 8: Veracruz 0 America 2; Toluca 4 Gallos Blancos 0; Monterrey 0 Puebla 0; San Luis 0 Guadalajara 2; Atlas 0 Colibries 0.
Mar 9: Atlante 3 Tecos UAG 2; Morelia 1 Cruz Azul 1; Necaxa 1 Tigres 2; Santos 2 Pachuca 0.
Mar 15: Colibries 2 San Luis 4; Tecos UAG 0 Morelia 2; Jaguares 1 Veracruz 2; Tigres 2 Atlante 1; Pachuca 2 Necaxa 0.
Mar 16: Gallos Blancos 2 Atlas 2; Guadalajara 1 Santos 0; Cruz Azul 2 Pumas UNAM 0; Puebla 3 Toluca 1; America 1 Monterrey 1.
Mar 22: Veracruz 2 Cruz Azul 0; Toluca 3 America 0; Monterrey 0 Jaguares 1; Morelia 2 Tigres 0; Atlas 2 Puebla 0.
Mar 23: Atlante 2 Pachuca 1; Gallos Blancos 1 Colibries 2; Necaxa 2 Guadalajara 2; Santos 2 San Luis 0.

MEXICO – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
America	11	5	3	3	15	10	18
Toluca	11	5	2	4	24	15	17
Atlas	11	4	4	3	16	13	16
Colibries	11	4	2	5	16	16	14
Puebla	11	2	2	7	8	18	8

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tigres	11	6	2	3	15	12	20
Monterrey	11	4	5	2	16	14	17
Pachuca	11	3	5	3	13	14	14
Pumas UNAM	10	3	3	4	11	16	12
Tecos UAG	10	0	2	8	8	20	2

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morelia	11	6	2	3	21	13	20
Necaxa	11	5	2	4	14	10	17
San Luis	11	4	3	4	15	19	15
Jaguares	11	3	2	6	10	19	11
Cruz Azul	11	1	6	4	12	20	8

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	11	6	4	1	20	12	22
Atlante	11	6	1	4	23	17	19
Santos	11	5	3	3	17	10	18
Veracruz	11	5	2	4	10	11	17
Gallos Blancos	11	2	5	4	9	14	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS
14 Sebastian Gonzalez (Atlante)
12 Jose Cardozo (Toluca)
10 Omar Bravo (Guadalajara)

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

In Bangkok, Thailand

March 10

Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) 1 (Luo Xiao 85)
Daejeon Citizen (SKo) 2 (Hang Jung-kook 9, Kim Eun-jung 45)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** M Moradi (Irn)

Kashima Antlers (Jap) 2 (Hirase 21, Fernando 83)
BEC Tero Sasana (Tha) 2 (Wuttiya 76, 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Hamdan (Sau)

March 12

Kashima Antlers 3 (Aoki 24, Fernando 56, Nozawa 90)
Shanghai Shenhua 4 (Yang Guang 1, Zhang Yuning 11, Martinez 31, 87)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Balu (Ins)

Daejeon Citizen 0
BEC Tero Sasana 2 (Panai 14, Therdsak 73)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Anura de Silva (Sri)
Sent off: Gong Oh-kyun (Daejeon) 80min

March 14

BEC Tero Sasana 2 (Jatupong 28, Therdsak 85)
Shanghai Shenhua 1 (Martinez 58)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Hamdan (Sau)

Daejeon Citizen 1 (Oumar 86)
Kashima Antlers 0
HT: 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BEC Tero Sasana	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Daejeon Citizen	3	2	0	1	3	3	6
Shanghai S'hua	3	1	0	2	6	7	3
Kashima Antlers	3	0	1	2	5	7	1

Group B

In Dalian, China

March 9

Songnam Chunma (SKo) 6 (Park Nam-yul 22, Kim Dae-eui 31, Kim Do-hoon 37, 61, 83, Drakulic 53)
Osotspa (Tha) 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Sent off: Pisal (Osotspa) 89min

Shimizu S-Pulse (Jap) 0
Dalian Shide (Chn) 0
Ref: Kim Jong-sik (NKo)

March 12

Shimizu S-Pulse 1 (Ahn Jung-hwan 53)
Songnam Chunma 2 (Drakulic pen 74, Kim Dae-eui 87)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Supain (Mly)

Osotspa 1 (Vimon 13)
Dalian Shide 7 (Hao Haidong 26, 32, 49, 60, Yan Song 58, Zuo Jie 81, Dong Fang Zhuo 83)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Setiyono

March 15

Dalian Shide 3 (Hao Haidong 57, 64, Yan Song 90)
Songnam Chunma 1 (Kim Dae-eui 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Sent off: Drakulic (Songnam) 72min

Osotspa 0
Shimizu S-Pulse 7 (Takagi 23, 40, Sawanobori 27, Alex 50, Ahn Jung-hwan 60, 71, Kitajima 75)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Setiyono

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dalian Shide	3	2	1	0	10	2	7
Songnam Ch'ma	3	2	0	1	9	4	6
Shimizu S-Pulse	3	1	1	1	8	2	4
Osotspa	3	0	0	3	1	20	0

Group C

In Al Ain, UAE

March 9

Al Sadd (Qat) 1 (Sergio 72)
Esteghlal (Irn) 2 (Samereh 5, Khatibi 65)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kamikawa (Jap)

Al Ain (UAE) 1 (Harib pen 13)
Al Hilal (Sau) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Shaban Gassem

March 12

Al Ain 2 (Traore 24, Sanogo 89)
Al Sadd 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Lu Jun (Chn)

Esteghlal 2 (Akbari 18, Samereh 42)
Al Hilal 3 (Suffo 34, 74, 85)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Mohd Salleh (Mly)

March 15

Al Hilal 1 (Abdullah Al-Dosari 58)
Al Sadd 3 (Keita 45, Sergio 80, Kamil 90)
HT: 0-1
Sent off: Abdullah Al-Dosari (Al Hilal) 75min

Esteghlal 1 (Samereh 75)
Al Ain 3 (F Ali 74, Sanogo 76, Harib 78)
HT: 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ain	3	3	0	0	6	1	9
Al Sadd	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Esteghlal	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Al Hilal	3	1	0	2	4	6	3

Group D

In Pakhtakor, Uzbekistan

March 9

Nisa (Tkm) 0
Pakhtakor (Uzb) 3 (Hamidullaev 44, Soliev 57, Koshelev 72)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Rungklay (Tha)

Al Talaba (Irq) 0
Pirouzi (Irn) 1 (Golmohammadi 63)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Okada (Jap)

March 11

Al Talaba 3 (Fawzi 10, Youness 24, 90)
Nisa 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bae Jae-yong (SKo)

Pakhtakor 1 (Soliev 22)
Pirouzi 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Okada (Jap)

March 13

Pirouzi 4 (Khanmohammadi 14, 76, Golmohammadi 47, Aslanian 90)
Nisa 1 (Meredov pen 89)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al-Marzouqi (UAE)
Sent off: Ansarian (Pirouzi) 86min

Pakhtakor 3 (Krokhmal 25, 57, Gochkuliev 37)
Al Talaba 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rungklay (Tha)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pakhtakor	3	3	0	0	7	0	9
Pirouzi	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Al Talaba	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Nisa	3	0	0	3	1	10	0

Group winners qualify for semi-finals

Semi-finals draw

Al Ain v Dalian Shide
BEC Tero Sasana v Pakhtakor
1st legs, April 9; 2nd legs, April 22/23

JAPAN

FIRST STAGE

Mar 21: Jubilo Iwata 2 Yokohama F Marinos 4.
Mar 22: JEF United Ichihara 2 Tokyo Verdy 1969 1; Kashima Antlers 3 Urawa Reds 1; FC Tokyo 2 Kashiwa Reysol 1; Cerezo Osaka 0 Vissel Kobe 1; Nagoya Grampus Eight 2 Shimizu S-Pulse 2.
Mar 23: Kyoto Purple Sanga 1 Gamba Osaka 2; Vegalta Sendai 1 Oita Trinita 0.

FIXTURES

BRAZIL

Sat, March 29

Guarani v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Paysandu
Corinthians v At Mineiro
At Paranaense v Gremio

Sun, March 30

Flamengo v Coritiba
Criciuma v Fluminense
Juventude v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Bahia
Vitoria v Figueirense
Cruzeiro v Sao Caetano
Internacional v Ponte Preta
Santos v Parana

Sat, April 5

Fluminense v Fortaleza
At Mineiro v Santos
Gremio v Guarani
Coritiba v Internacional

Sun, April 6

Bahia v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Goias
Figueirense v Corinthians
Sao Paulo v Cruzeiro
Paysandu v Vitoria
Ponte Preta v Juventude
Parana v At Paranaense
Sao Caetano v Criciuma

Wed, April 9

Paysandu v Santos

Sat, April 12

Internacional v Bahia
Cruzeiro v Ponte Preta
At Paranaense v At Mineiro
Santos v Figueirense

Sun, April 13

Vitoria v Vasco da Gama
Flamengo v Fluminense
Corinthians v Paysandu
Criciuma v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Sao Caetano
Juventude v Coritiba
Guarani v Parana
Goias v Gremio

Wed, April 16

Sao Caetano v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Corinthians
Bahia v Juventude
Gremio v Vitoria
Coritiba v Cruzeiro
At Mineiro v Guarani
Figueirense v At Paranaense
Ponte Preta v Criciuma

Thu, April 17

Fluminense v Internacional
Parana v Goias
Sao Paulo v Fortaleza

Sat, April 19

Flamengo v Santos
Bahia v At Mineiro
Sao Caetano v Gremio

Sun, April 20

Sao Paulo v Vasco da Gama
Fluminense v Parana
Cruzeiro v Goias
Internacional v Corinthians
Ponte Preta v Paysandu
Fortaleza v At Paranaense
Juventude v Vitoria
Coritiba v Figueirense
Criciuma v Guarani

Sat, April 26

Gremio v Fluminense
Parana v Bahia
Guarani v Cruzeiro
Vitoria v Internacional

Sun, April 27

Corinthians v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Sao Caetano
Goias v Juventude
Paysandu v Sao Paulo
Santos v Fortaleza
At Mineiro v Coritiba
At Paranaense v Criciuma
Figueirense v Ponte Preta

Sat, May 3

Flamengo v Vitoria
Bahia v Gremio
Cruzeiro v At Paranaense

Sun, May 4

Fluminense v Vasco da Gama
Fortaleza v Corinthians
Sao Paulo v Figueirense
Sao Caetano v Paysandu
Internacional v Goias
Ponte Preta v At Mineiro
Juventude v Guarani
Coritiba v Parana
Criciuma v Santos

Sat, May 10

Goias v Flamengo
Corinthians v Criciuma
Santos v Cruzeiro
Parana v Ponte Preta

Sun, May 11

Vasco da Gama v Bahia
Paysandu v Fluminense
At Mineiro v Sao Paulo
Vitoria v Fortaleza
Gremio v Coritiba
Guarani v Internacional
At Paranaense v Juventude
Figueirense v Sao Caetano

Sat, May 17

Fluminense v Figueirense
Sao Paulo v Parana
Bahia v Paysandu
Sao Caetano v At Mineiro

Sun, May 18

Flamengo v Guarani
Coritiba v Vasco da Gama
Fortaleza v Goias
Cruzeiro v Corinthians
Ponte Preta v Gremio
Criciuma v Vitoria
Internacional v At Paranaense
Juventude v Santos

Sat, May 24

At Mineiro v Fluminense
Corinthians v Juventude
Vasco da Gama v Ponte Preta
Parana v Sao Caetano

Sun, May 25

At Paranaense v Flamengo
Paysandu v Coritiba
Goias v Criciuma
Gremio v Sao Paulo
Guarani v Fortaleza
Figueirense v Bahia
Vitoria v Cruzeiro
Santos v Internacional

Sat, May 31

Fluminense v At Paranaense
Internacional v Paysandu
Cruzeiro v Criciuma
Coritiba v Guarani
Ponte Preta v Sao Caetano

Sun, June 1

Parana v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v At Mineiro
Bahia v Goias
Corinthians v Vitoria
Santos v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Juventude
Figueirense v Gremio

Sat, June 7

Vitoria v Fluminense
Guarani v Santos
Gremio v Fortaleza
At Mineiro v Figueirense

Sun, June 8

Criciuma v Internacional
Flamengo v Cruzeiro
Juventude v Vasco da Gama
Sao Paulo v Bahia
Goias v Coritiba
Sao Caetano v Corinthians
Paysandu v Parana
At Paranaense v Ponte Preta

Sat, June 14

Bahia v Vitoria
Coritiba v At Paranaense
Fluminense v Goias

Sun, June 15

Vasco da Gama v Flamengo
Corinthians v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Paysandu
Parana v Juventude
Cruzeiro v At Mineiro
Gremio v Internacional
Ponte Preta v Guarani
Santos v Sao Caetano
Criciuma v Figueirense

Sat, June 21

Vasco da Gama v Criciuma
At Mineiro v Gremio
Sao Paulo v Goias

Sun, June 22

Paysandu v Flamengo
Fluminense v Guarani
Ponte Preta v Corinthians
Figueirense v Fortaleza
Bahia v Coritiba
Sao Caetano v Vitoria
Juventude v Cruzeiro
Internacional v Parana
At Paranaense v Santos

Sat, June 28

Flamengo v Figueirense
Fortaleza v Vasco da Gama
Coritiba v Sao Caetano
Gremio v Juventude
Santos v Bahia

Sun, June 29

Corinthians v Fluminense
Goias v Ponte Preta
Guarani v Sao Paulo
Criciuma v Paysandu
Vitoria v At Paranaense
Parana v At Mineiro
Cruzeiro v Internacional

Sat, July 5

Vasco da Gama v Parana
Sao Paulo v Sao Caetano
Juventude v Internacional

Sun, July 6

Gremio v Flamengo
Fluminense v Bahia
Guarani v Goias
At Paranaense v Corinthians
At Mineiro v Paysandu
Fortaleza v Criciuma
Vitoria v Ponte Preta
Figueirense v Cruzeiro
Santos v Coritiba

Wed, July 9

Cruzeiro v Fortaleza
Bahia v Guarani
Sao Caetano v At Paranaense
Flamengo v Juventude
Parana v Gremio
Internacional v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Vitoria
Coritiba v Sao Paulo
Paysandu v Figueirense

Thu, July 10

Corinthians v Santos
Ponte Preta v Fluminense
Criciuma v At Mineiro

Sat, July 12

At Paranaense v Goias
Vasco da Gama v Paysandu
Fortaleza v Internacional

Sun, July 13

Gremio v Cruzeiro
At Mineiro v Flamengo
Ponte Preta v Bahia
Vitoria v Santos
Corinthians v Coritiba
Criciuma v Juventude
Figueirense v Parana
Sao Caetano v Guarani
Fluminense v Sao Paulo

Wed, July 16

Parana v Criciuma
Santos v Ponte Preta
Flamengo v Fortaleza
Cruzeiro v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Corinthians
Paysandu v Gremio
Bahia v Sao Caetano
Guarani v Vitoria
Internacional v At Mineiro
Juventude v Figueirense

Thu, July 17

Coritiba v Fluminense
Sao Paulo v At Paranaense

Sat, July 19

Juventude v Paysandu
Internacional v Figueirense
Fluminense v Santos
Corinthians v Guarani
Fortaleza v At Mineiro

Sun, July 20

At Paranaense v Bahia
Cruzeiro v Parana
Vasco da Gama v Gremio
Ponte Preta v Coritiba
Criciuma v Flamengo
Goias v Sao Caetano
Vitoria v Sao Paulo

Wed, July 23

Figueirense v Vasco da Gama
At Mineiro v Juventude
Guarani v At Paranaense
Santos v Goias
Bahia v Corinthians
Parana v Fortaleza
Paysandu v Cruzeiro

Thu, July 24

Coritiba v Vitoria
Sao Paulo v Ponte Preta
Flamengo v Internacional
Sao Caetano v Fluminense
Gremio v Criciuma

Sat, July 26

Santos v Vasco da Gama
Goias v At Mineiro
At Paranaense v Paysandu

Sun, July 27

Internacional v Sao Caetano
Fortaleza v Ponte Preta
Cruzeiro v Bahia
Vitoria v Parana
Criciuma v Coritiba
Guarani v Figueirense
Flamengo v Sao Paulo
Juventude v Fluminense
Corinthians v Gremio

Sat, August 2

Fluminense v Cruzeiro
Sao Caetano v Juventude
Sao Paulo v Internacional
Gremio v Santos

Sun, August 3

Figueirense v Goias
Parana v Corinthians
Paysandu v Guarani
Coritiba v Fortaleza
Bahia v Criciuma
Ponte Preta v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v At Paranaense
At Mineiro v Vitoria

Wed, August 6

Goias v Vasco da Gama
Vitoria v Paysandu
At Paranaense v Parana
Criciuma v Sao Caetano
Santos v At Mineiro
Fortaleza v Fluminense
Juventude v Ponte Preta
Cruzeiro v Sao Paulo

Thu, August 7

Flamengo v Bahia
Corinthians v Figueirense
Guarani v Gremio
Internacional v Coritiba

Sat, August 9

Fluminense v Criciuma
Sao Paulo v Juventude
Sao Caetano v Cruzeiro
Parana v Santos

Sun, August 10

Gremio v At Paranaense
Paysandu v Goias
Ponte Preta v Internacional
Coritiba v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Guarani
At Mineiro v Corinthians
Bahia v Fortaleza
Figueirense v Vitoria

Sat, August 16

Vasco da Gama v Vitoria
Bahia v Internacional
At Mineiro v At Paranaense
Figueirense v Santos
Sao Paulo v Criciuma
Coritiba v Juventude

Sun, August 17

Paysandu v Corinthians
Fluminense v Flamengo
Sao Caetano v Fortaleza
Ponte Preta v Cruzeiro
Gremio v Goias
Parana v Guarani

Wed, August 20

Flamengo v Sao Caetano
Santos v Paysandu
Corinthians v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Parana
Fortaleza v Sao Paulo
Juventude v Bahia
Cruzeiro v Coritiba
At Paranaense v Figueirense
Vitoria v Gremio
Criciuma v Ponte Preta

Thu, August 21

Internacional v Fluminense
Guarani v At Mineiro

Sat, August 23

Santos v Flamengo
Gremio v Sao Caetano
At Paranaense v Fortaleza
Goias v Cruzeiro

Sun, August 24

Vasco da Gama v Sao Paulo
Paysandu v Ponte Preta
Parana v Fluminense
Corinthians v Internacional
At Mineiro v Bahia
Vitoria v Juventude
Figueirense v Coritiba
Guarani v Criciuma

Sat, August 30

Fluminense v Gremio
Fortaleza v Santos
Cruzeiro v Guarani
Sao Paulo v Paysandu
Internacional v Vitoria

Sun, August 31

Sao Caetano v Vasco da Gama
Juventude v Goias
Flamengo v Corinthians
Coritiba v At Mineiro
Criciuma v At Paranaense
Bahia v Parana
Ponte Preta v Figueirense

Sat, September 13

Corinthians v Fortaleza
Gremio v Bahia
Santos v Criciuma
At Paranaense v Cruzeiro

Sun, September 14

Vitoria v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Fluminense
Goias v Internacional
Figueirense v Sao Paulo
At Mineiro v Ponte Preta
Paysandu v Sao Caetano
Guarani v Juventude
Parana v Coritiba

Sat, September 20

Fluminense v Paysandu
Internacional v Guarani
Cruzeiro v Santos
Coritiba v Gremio

Sun, September 21

Bahia v Vasco da Gama
Criciuma v Corinthians
Fortaleza v Vitoria
Flamengo v Goias
Juventude v At Paranaense
Ponte Preta v Parana
Sao Caetano v Figueirense
Sao Paulo v At Mineiro

Wed, September 24

Guarani v Flamengo
Goias v Fortaleza
Parana v Sao Paulo
Paysandu v Bahia
Vitoria v Criciuma
Gremio v Ponte Preta
At Paranaense v Internacional
Santos v Juventude

Thu, September 25

Figueirense v Fluminense
Vasco da Gama v Coritiba
At Mineiro v Sao Caetano
Corinthians v Cruzeiro

Sat, September 27

Internacional v Santos
Flamengo v At Paranaense
Sao Paulo v Gremio

Sun, September 28

Fluminense v At Mineiro
Fortaleza v Guarani
Criciuma v Goias
Juventude v Corinthians
Ponte Preta v Vasco da Gama
Bahia v Figueirense
Cruzeiro v Vitoria
Coritiba v Paysandu
Sao Caetano v Parana

Sat, October 4

At Paranaense v Fluminense
Paysandu v Internacional
Gremio v Figueirense
Sao Caetano v Ponte Preta
Sao Paulo v Santos

Sun, October 5

Vitoria v Corinthians
Flamengo v Parana
Goias v Bahia
At Mineiro v Vasco da Gama
Juventude v Fortaleza
Criciuma v Cruzeiro
Guarani v Coritiba

Wed, October 8

Cruzeiro v Flamengo
Fluminense v Vitoria
Coritiba v Goias
Bahia v Sao Paulo
Santos v Guarani
Ponte Preta v At Paranaense

Thu, October 9

Fortaleza v Gremio
Vasco da Gama v Juventude
Parana v Paysandu
Corinthians v Sao Caetano
Figueirense v At Mineiro
Internacional v Criciuma

Sat, October 11

Vitoria v Bahia
At Paranaense v Coritiba
Guarani v Ponte Preta

Sun, October 12

Flamengo v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Fluminense
Sao Paulo v Corinthians
At Mineiro v Cruzeiro
Internacional v Gremio
Juventude v Parana
Figueirense v Criciuma
Sao Caetano v Santos

Wed, October 15

Paysandu v Fortaleza

Sat, October 18

Flamengo v Paysandu
Guarani v Fluminense

Sun, October 19

Corinthians v Ponte Preta
Santos v At Paranaense
Parana v Internacional
Criciuma v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Figueirense
Coritiba v Bahia
Vitoria v Sao Caetano
Cruzeiro v Juventude
Gremio v At Mineiro

Wed, October 22

Paysandu v Criciuma
Sao Caetano v Coritiba

Thu, October 23

Figueirense v Flamengo
Fluminense v Corinthians
Ponte Preta v Goias
Bahia v Santos
At Paranaense v Vitoria
Internacional v Cruzeiro
At Mineiro v Parana
Juventude v Gremio
Vasco da Gama v Fortaleza
Sao Paulo v Guarani

Sat, October 25

Bahia v Fluminense
Paysandu v At Mineiro

Sun, October 26

Cruzeiro v Figueirense
Coritiba v Santos
Parana v Vasco da Gama
Flamengo v Gremio
Corinthians v At Paranaense
Sao Caetano v Sao Paulo
Criciuma v Fortaleza
Ponte Preta v Vitoria
Internacional v Juventude
Goias v Guarani

Sat, November 1

Fluminense v Ponte Preta
Sao Paulo v Coritiba

Sun, November 2

At Mineiro v Criciuma
Fortaleza v Cruzeiro
Vasco da Gama v Internacional
Figueirense v Paysandu
Vitoria v Goias
Santos v Corinthians
Juventude v Flamengo
Guarani v Bahia
At Paranaense v Sao Caetano
Gremio v Parana

Wed, November 5

Paysandu v Vasco da Gama
Juventude v Criciuma

Thu, November 6

Sao Paulo v Fluminense
Coritiba v Corinthians
Guarani v Sao Caetano
Bahia v Ponte Preta
Santos v Vitoria
Goias v At Paranaense
Cruzeiro v Gremio
Flamengo v At Mineiro
Internacional v Fortaleza
Parana v Figueirense

Sat, November 8

Ponte Preta v Santos
Gremio v Paysandu
Vitoria v Guarani
Figueirense v Juventude

Sun, November 9

Fluminense v Coritiba
Fortaleza v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Cruzeiro
Corinthians v Goias
At Paranaense v Sao Paulo
At Mineiro v Internacional
Sao Caetano v Bahia
Criciuma v Parana

Sat, November 22

Santos v Fluminense
Sao Paulo v Vitoria

Sun, November 23

Parana v Cruzeiro
At Mineiro v Fortaleza
Flamengo v Criciuma
Gremio v Vasco da Gama
Sao Caetano v Goias
Guarani v Corinthians
Paysandu v Juventude
Bahia v At Paranaense
Figueirense v Internacional
Coritiba v Ponte Preta

Sat, November 29

Cruzeiro v Paysandu
Vasco da Gama v Figueirense

Sun, November 30

Corinthians v Bahia
Juventude v At Mineiro
Fluminense v Sao Caetano
Goias v Santos
Ponte Preta v Sao Paulo
Fortaleza v Parana
Vitoria v Coritiba
Internacional v Flamengo
Criciuma v Gremio
At Paranaense v Guarani

Sat, December 6

Cruzeiro v Fluminense
Guarani v Paysandu

Sun, December 7

Vitoria v At Mineiro
Fortaleza v Coritiba
At Paranaense v Vasco da Gama
Goias v Figueirense
Corinthians v Parana
Internacional v Sao Paulo
Flamengo v Ponte Preta
Criciuma v Bahia
Santos v Gremio
Juventude v Sao Caetano

Sat, December 13

Sao Paulo v Flamengo
Vasco da Gama v Santos

Sun, December 14

Fluminense v Juventude
At Mineiro v Goias
Gremio v Corinthians
Paysandu v At Paranaense
Ponte Preta v Fortaleza
Bahia v Cruzeiro
Parana v Vitoria
Sao Caetano v Internacional
Coritiba v Criciuma
Figueirense v Guarani

Ball watching...Flamengo (black and red) v Fluminense

EURO 2004 QUALIFIERS

● *Full details on the two most recent rounds of games in next month's issue*

Group 1

07.09.02 .....Cyprus-France 1-2
07.09.02 .....Slovenia-Malta 3-0
12.10.02 .....France-Slovenia 5-0
12.10.02 .....Malta-Israel 0-2
16.10.02 .....Malta-France 0-4
20.11.02 .....Cyprus-Malta 2-1
29.03.03 .....Cyprus-Israel 1-1
29.03.03 .....France-Malta 6-0
02.04.03 .....Israel-France
02.04.03 .....Slovenia-Cyprus
30.04.03 .....Israel-Cyprus
30.04.03 .....Malta-Slovenia
07.06.03 .....Israel-Slovenia
07.06.03 .....Malta-Cyprus
06.09.03 .....France-Cyprus
06.09.03 .....Slovenia-Israel
10.09.03 .....Israel-Malta
10.09.03 .....Slovenia-France
11.10.03 .....Cyprus-Slovenia
11.10.03 .....France-Israel

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	4	4	0	0	17	1	12
Israel	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Cyprus	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Slovenia	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Malta	5	0	0	5	1	17	0

Group 2

07.09.02 .....Bosnia-Herzegovina-Romania 0-3
07.09.02 .....Norway-Denmark 2-2
12.10.02 .....Denmark-Luxembourg 2-0
12.10.02 .....Romania-Norway 0-1
16.10.02 .....Luxembourg-Romania 0-7
16.10.02 .....Norway-Bosnia-Herzegovina 2-0
29.03.03 .....Bosnia-Herzegovina-Luxembourg ..2-0
29.03.03 .....Romania-Denmark 2-5
02.04.03 .....Denmark-Bosnia-Herzegovina
02.04.03 .....Luxembourg-Norway
07.06.03 .....Denmark-Norway
07.06.03 .....Romania-Bosnia-Herzegovina
11.06.03 .....Luxembourg-Denmark
11.06.03 .....Norway-Romania
06.09.03 .....Bosnia-Herzegovina-Norway
06.09.03 .....Romania-Luxembourg
10.09.03 .....Denmark-Romania
10.09.03 .....Luxembourg-Bosnia-Herzegovina
11.10.03 .....Bosnia-Herzegovina-Denmark
11.10.03 .....Norway-Luxembourg

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	3	2	1	0	9	4	7
Norway	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Romania	4	2	0	2	12	6	6
Bosnia-Herz	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Luxembourg	3	0	0	3	0	11	0

Group 3

07.09.02 .....Austria-Moldova 2-0
07.09.02 .....Holland-Belarus 3-0
12.10.02 .....Belarus-Austria 0-2
12.10.02 .....Moldova-Czech Republic 0-2
16.10.02 .....Austria-Holland 0-3
16.10.02 .....Czech Republic-Belarus 2-0
29.03.03 .....Belarus-Moldova 2-1
29.03.03 .....Holland-Czech Republic 1-1
02.04.03 .....Czech Republic-Austria
02.04.03 .....Moldova-Holland
07.06.03 .....Belarus-Holland
07.06.03 .....Moldova-Austria
11.06.03 .....Austria-Belarus
11.06.03 .....Czech Republic-Moldova
06.09.03 .....Belarus-Czech Republic
06.09.03 .....Holland-Austria
10.09.03 .....Czech Republic-Holland
10.09.03 .....Moldova-Belarus
11.10.03 .....Austria-Czech Republic
11.10.03 .....Holland-Moldova

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Republic	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Holland	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Austria	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Belarus	4	1	0	3	2	8	3
Moldova	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

Group 4

07.09.02 .....Latvia-Sweden 0-0
07.09.02 .....San Marino-Poland 0-2
12.10.02 .....Poland-Latvia 0-1
12.10.02 .....Sweden-Hungary 1-1
16.10.02 .....Hungary-San Marino 3-0
20.11.02 .....San Marino-Latvia 0-1
29.03.03 .....Poland-Hungary 0-0
02.04.03 .....Hungary-Sweden
02.04.03 .....Poland-San Marino
30.04.03 .....Latvia-San Marino
07.06.03 .....Hungary-Latvia
07.06.03 .....San Marino-Sweden
11.06.03 .....San Marino-Hungary
11.06.03 .....Sweden-Poland
06.09.03 .....Latvia-Poland
06.09.03 .....Sweden-San Marino
10.09.03 .....Latvia-Hungary
10.09.03 .....Poland-Sweden
11.10.03 .....Hungary-Poland
11.10.03 .....Sweden-Latvia

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Latvia	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
Hungary	3	1	2	0	4	1	5
Poland	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Sweden	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
San Marino	3	0	0	3	0	6	0

Group 5

07.09.02 .....Faroe Islands-Scotland 2-2
07.09.02 .....Lithuania-Germany 0-2
12.10.02 .....Iceland-Scotland 0-2
12.10.02 .....Lithuania-Faroe Islands 2-0
16.10.02 .....Germany-Faroe Islands 2-1
16.10.02 .....Iceland-Lithuania 3-0
29.03.03 .....Germany-Lithuania 1-1
29.03.03 .....Scotland-Iceland 2-1
02.04.03 .....Lithuania-Scotland
07.06.03 .....Iceland-Faroe Islands
07.06.03 .....Scotland-Germany
11.06.03 .....Faroe Islands-Germany
11.06.03 .....Lithuania-Iceland
20.08.03 .....Faroe Islands-Iceland
06.09.03 .....Iceland-Germany
06.09.03 .....Scotland-Faroe Islands
10.09.03 .....Faroe Islands-Lithuania
10.09.03 .....Germany-Scotland
11.10.03 .....Germany-Iceland
11.10.03 .....Scotland-Lithuania

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scotland	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Germany	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Lithuania	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Iceland	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Faroe Islands	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group 6

07.09.02 .....Armenia-Ukraine 2-2
07.09.02 .....Greece-Spain 0-2
12.10.02 .....Spain-Northern Ireland 3-0
12.10.02 .....Ukraine-Greece 2-0
16.10.02 .....Greece-Armenia 2-0
16.10.02 .....Northern Ireland-Ukraine 0-0
29.03.03 .....Armenia-Northern Ireland 1-0
29.03.03 .....Ukraine-Spain 2-2
02.04.03 .....Northern Ireland-Greece
02.04.03 .....Spain-Armenia
07.06.03 .....Spain-Greece
07.06.03 .....Ukraine-Armenia
11.06.03 .....Greece-Ukraine
11.06.03 .....Northern Ireland-Spain
06.09.03 .....Armenia-Greece
06.09.03 .....Ukraine-Northern Ireland
10.09.03 .....Northern Ireland-Armenia
10.09.03 .....Spain-Ukraine
11.10.03 .....Armenia-Spain
11.10.03 .....Greece-Northern Ireland

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Ukraine	4	1	3	0	6	4	6
Armenia	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Greece	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Northern Ireland	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

Group 7

07.09.02 .....Turkey-Slovakia 3-0
08.09.02 .....Liechtenstein-Macedonia 1-1
12.10.02 .....Macedonia-Turkey 1-2
12.10.02 .....Slovakia-England 1-2
16.10.02 .....England-Macedonia 2-2
16.10.02 .....Turkey-Liechtenstein 5-0
29.03.03 .....Liechtenstein-England 0-2
29.03.03 .....Macedonia-Slovakia 0-2
02.04.03 .....England-Turkey
02.04.03 .....Slovakia-Liechtenstein
07.06.03 .....Macedonia-Liechtenstein
07.06.03 .....Slovakia-Turkey
11.06.03 .....England-Slovakia
11.06.03 .....Turkey-Macedonia
06.09.03 .....Liechtenstein-Turkey
06.09.03 .....Macedonia-England
10.09.03 .....England-Liechtenstein
10.09.03 .....Slovakia-Macedonia
11.10.03 .....Liechtenstein-Slovakia
11.10.03 .....Turkey-England

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkey	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
England	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Slovakia	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Macedonia	4	0	2	2	4	7	2
Liechtenstein	3	0	1	2	1	8	1

Group 8

07.09.02 .....Belgium-Bulgaria 0-2
07.09.02 .....Croatia-Estonia 0-0
12.10.02 .....Andorra-Belgium 0-1
12.10.02 .....Bulgaria-Croatia 2-0
16.10.02 .....Bulgaria-Andorra 2-1
16.10.02 .....Estonia-Belgium 0-1
29.03.03 .....Croatia-Belgium 4-0
02.04.03 .....Croatia-Andorra
02.04.03 .....Estonia-Bulgaria
30.04.03 .....Andorra-Estonia
07.06.03 .....Bulgaria-Belgium
07.06.03 .....Estonia-Andorra
11.06.03 .....Belgium-Andorra
11.06.03 .....Estonia-Croatia
06.09.03 .....Andorra-Croatia
06.09.03 .....Bulgaria-Estonia
10.09.03 .....Andorra-Bulgaria
10.09.03 .....Belgium-Croatia
11.10.03 .....Belgium-Estonia
11.10.03 .....Croatia-Bulgaria

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bulgaria	3	3	0	0	6	1	9
Belgium	4	2	0	2	2	6	6
Croatia	3	1	1	1	4	2	4
Estonia	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Andorra	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Group 9

07.09.02 .....Azerbaijan-Italy 0-2
07.09.02 .....Finland-Wales 0-2
12.10.02 .....Finland-Azerbaijan 3-0
12.10.02 .....Italy-Serbia & Montenegro* 1-1
16.10.02 .....Wales-Italy 2-1
16.10.02 .....Serbia & Montenegro*-Finland 2-0
20.11.02 .....Azerbaijan-Wales 0-2
12.02.03 .....Serbia & Montenegro-Azerbaijan 2-2
29.03.03 .....Italy-Finland 2-0
29.03.03 .....Wales-Azerbaijan 4-0
07.06.03 .....Finland-Serbia & Montenegro
11.06.03 .....Azerbaijan-Serbia & Montenegro
11.06.03 .....Finland-Italy
20.08.03 .....Serbia & Montenegro-Wales
06.09.03 .....Azerbaijan-Finland
06.09.03 .....Italy-Wales
10.09.03 .....Serbia & Montenegro-Italy
10.09.03 .....Wales-Finland
11.10.03 .....Italy-Azerbaijan
11.10.03 .....Wales-Serbia & Montenegro
**Serbia & Montenegro played first two qualifiers as Yugoslavia*

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wales	4	4	0	0	10	1	12
Italy	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Serbia & M'negro	3	1	2	0	5	3	5
Finland	4	1	0	3	3	6	3
Azerbaijan	5	0	1	4	2	13	1

Group 10

07.09.02 .....Russia-Rep Ireland 4-2
08.09.02 .....Switzerland-Georgia 4-1
12.10.02 .....Albania-Switzerland 1-1
16.10.02 .....Rep Ireland-Switzerland 1-2
16.10.02 .....Russia-Albania 4-1
29.03.03 .....Albania-Russia 3-1
29.03.03 .....Georgia-Rep Ireland 1-2
02.04.03 .....Albania-Rep Ireland
02.04.03 .....Georgia-Switzerland
30.04.03 .....Georgia-Russia
07.06.03 .....Rep Ireland-Albania
07.06.03 .....Switzerland-Russia
11.06.03 .....Rep Ireland-Georgia
11.06.03 .....Switzerland-Albania
06.09.03 .....Georgia-Albania
06.09.03 .....Rep Ireland-Russia
10.09.03 .....Albania-Georgia
10.09.03 .....Russia-Switzerland
11.10.03 .....Russia-Georgia
11.10.03 .....Switzerland-Rep Ireland

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Russia	3	2	0	1	9	6	6
Albania	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Rep Ireland	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Georgia	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

● The 10 group winners qualify for the finals automatically; the 10 runners-up will play-off in five head-to-head, home and away ties, the winners of which also qualify.
● Qualifying play-off dates: Nov 15, 2003; Nov 19, 2003.
● Portugal qualify automatically for the finals as hosts.

FINALS SCHEDULE

Group A

12.06.04 .....Portugal v A2 (Das Antas, Oporto; 18:00)
12.06.04 .....A3 v A4 (Faro/Loule; 20:45)
16.06.04 .....A2 v A3 (Bessa, Oporto; 18:00)
16.06.04 .....A4 v Portugal (Da Luz, Lisbon; 20:45)
20.06.04 .....A4 v A2 (Faro/Loule; 20:45)
20.06.04 .....A3 v Portugal (Alvalade, Lisbon; 20:45)

Group B

13.06.04 .....B3 v B4 (Leiria; 18:00)
13.06.04 .....B1 v B2 (Da Luz, Lisbon; 20:45)
17.06.04 .....B2 v B3 (Coimbra; 18:00)
17.06.04 .....B4 v B1 (Leiria; 20:45)
21.06.04 .....B4 v B2 (Coimbra; 20:45)
21.06.04 .....B3 v B1 (Da Luz, Lisbon; 20:45)

Group C

14.06.04 .....C3 v C4 (Guimaraes; 18:00)
14.06.04 .....C1 v C2 (Alvalade, Lisbon; 20:45)
18.06.04 .....C2 v C3 (Braga; 18:00)
18.06.04 .....C4 v C1 (Das Antas, Oporto; 20:45)
22.06.04 .....C4 v C2 (Guimaraes; 20:45)
22.06.04 .....C3 v C1 (Bessa, Oporto; 20:45)

Group D

15.06.04 .....D3 v D4 (Aveiro; 18:00)
15.06.04 .....D1 v D2 (Das Antas, Oporto; 20:45)
19.06.04 .....D2 v D3 (Bessa, Oporto; 18:00)
19.06.04 .....D4 v D1 (Aveiro; 20:45)
23.06.04 .....D4 v D2 (Braga; 20:45)
23.06.04 .....D3 v D1 (Alvalade, Lisbon; 20:45)

Quarter-finals

24.06.04 .....Gp A winners v Gp B runners-up (QF1) (Da Luz, Lisbon; 20:45)
25.06.04 .....Gp B winners v Gp A runners-up (QF2) (Alvalade, Lisbon; 20:45)
26.06.04 .....Gp C winners v Gp D runners-up (QF3) (Faro/Loule; 20:45)
27.06.04 .....Gp D winners v Gp C runners-up (QF4) (Das Antas, Oporto; 20:45)

Semi-finals

30.06.04 .....QF1 winners v QF3 winners (Alvalade, Lisbon; 20:45)
01.07.04 .....QF2 winners v QF4 winners (Das Antas, Oporto; 20:45)

Final

04.07.04 .....(Da Luz, Lisbon; 20:45)

The stadiums

Municipal, Braga (30,000 capacity)
D Afonso Henriques, Guimaraes (30,000)
Das Antas, Oporto (50,000)
Bessa, Oporto (30,000)
Municipal, Aveiro (30,000)
Municipal, Coimbra (30,000)
Dr Magalhaes Pessoa, Leiria (30,000)
Da Luz, Lisbon (65,000)
Jose Alvalade, Lisbon (50,000)
Algarve, Faro/Loule (30,000)

Almost there...Real Madrid moved a step closer to the title after beating Deportivo 2-0

Madrid close in

Sid Lowe reports from the Spanish capital as the favourites look set to claim the title

REVENGE was in the air. So was the League title. It was Real Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna and the last time the sides met in the capital, last year, Depor achieved the famous *centenariazo* – their Cup Final victory against Real Madrid, at the Bernabeu, on Madrid's 100th birthday.

It was billed as the game to decide the title, a golden opportunity for Deportivo. Madrid had wrestled top spot from Real Sociedad, while Javier Irureta's side hadn't lost in the *segunda vuelta* (the second half of the season), had climbed to within touching distance of their opponents, and top scorer Roy Makaay was brimming with confidence on 20 goals – even if he had missed out on Bebeto's consecutive scoring record, thanks to team-mate Diego Tristan's refusal to let him take a penalty against Villarreal two weeks earlier.

It was Madrid who took what full-back Michel Salgado described as a "giant leap" towards the title, their 2-0 win carrying them three points clear of Real Sociedad, six ahead of Depor and 10 above Valencia with 11 games left. Even so, Irureta, a complicated calculations addict, claimed "winning the League is not so hard – Madrid still have to go to Real Sociedad and to Valencia."

But few query the fact that Madrid are clear favourites now. After a patchy start, they look settled, better organised and confident. They've shored things up at the back, where Ivan Helguera has been superb and youngster Paco Pavon, filling in for Fernando Hierro, seems finally to have found his first-team feet. Ahead of them, even unsung hero Claude Makelele is starting to get long-overdue recognition. Raul is as reliable as ever, as are Michel Salgado and Roberto Carlos, while Zinedine Zidane continues to perform with an elegance, grace and apparent ease that is almost insulting.

Perhaps most significant, though, is that Ronaldo has won over the critics – and, finally, the crowd. Not so much for his goals, but for his endeavour – in question amid accusations of late nights, over-eating and an unwillingness to pull his weight.

Against Depor, Ronaldo put such criticisms behind him. Just before half-time, he broke up a Depor move and chased over 50 yards, winning a throw deep inside the Galicians' half. The Bernabeu, which had whistled and jeered the Brazilian in previous matches, responded first with an ovation and then with celebration: from the throw, Ronaldo battled to scramble a pass for Zidane to score. Five minutes into the second half, he added one himself, slotting past Jose Molina after Raul cleverly dummied a neat pass from Zidane. It was his 14th League goal.

Although Madrid were not exactly awesome – Depor winger Victor rightly complained that they "beat us walking" – there is a quiet authority about them now. And with such individual talent they always have a Get Out of Jail Free card spare – especially in the Champions League. Last month it was Javier Portillo in Dortmund; this time it was Ronaldo away to Lokomotiv Moscow, a rare header earning a quarter-final spot against Man United.

Madrid's players couldn't be happier. They were desperate to face Alex Ferguson's side, avoiding Valencia and Barcelona. Steve McManaman admitted that his team-mates were "dancing round" when the draw was made.

Plenty of excitement, too, at the other end of the city as Jesus Gil announced Atletico Madrid's centenary celebrations. Unsurprisingly, from the man who celebrated the 1996 Double by riding around on an elephant, they promise to be spectacular.

There will be stamps, watches and a special shirt; a centenary anthem sung by Joaquin Sabina; the Rolling Stones in concert, supported by keeper German 'El Mono' Burgos; a Spanish Air Force fly-by; and a special bullfight, complete with Atletico-supporting *toreros* and bulls from Gil's ranch.

No wonder Gil was "touching heaven", even if a Champions League place continues to elude his side after disappointing results against Celta Vigo (1-0 loss at home) and Rayo Vallecano (0-0, away).

At least Atletico can join Deportivo in welcoming back their goalkeeper after serious illness. Depor's Molina returned from successful chemotherapy against Juventus in the Champions League, while Atletico's Burgos responded well to treatment on a kidney tumour and was discharged in record time.

However, Burgos' mother can't have been quite so confident; her son calmed pre-operation nerves thus: "Don't worry, mum: the doctor who's operating on me can see well enough out of his good eye!"

Finally, there's been more ham-fisted failure from the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), this time in deciding the venue for the Copa del Rey Final between Mallorca and the country's oldest club, Recreativo de Huelva.

What should have been a historic contest between two clubs who've never won a major trophy has, instead, been a mess of arguments and counter-arguments. The RFEF finally opted for the home of Second Division Elche. But the Martinez Valero stadium holds only 37,000, prompting fresh calls for a national stadium. Not that the model cited is exactly ideal – England.

> **'Madrid are clear favourites now. After a patchy start, they look settled, better organised and confident'**

All eyes on Manchester

Calcio's revival will be complete only if an Italian side lifts the Champions League trophy at Old Trafford, says Paddy Agnew

SO FAR, this has been a glorious springtime for Italian football. Firstly, three sides – Juventus, Milan and Internazionale – qualified for the quarter-finals of the Champions League, thus going some long way to compensating for the miserable European whitewash of recent seasons. Secondly, Lazio also flew the Italian flag proudly, qualifying for a difficult UEFA Cup semi-final clash with Portuguese League leaders Porto.

It remains to be seen whether this Italian renaissance will last all the way. For, make no mistake, the Italian football community will only consider the job well done if and when one of its representatives lifts this season's Champions League trophy at Manchester's Old Trafford in May.

Assessing Italian chances on the eve of the quarter-finals, one thing is obvious. The draw has been kind to the Italians since they avoided not only Manchester United and Real Madrid but also the thing they were dreading most, an Italian derby. If the Italian clubs are good enough, and that is still a very big 'if', then they have been handed a golden chance to regain the trophy for the first time since Juventus won it in 1996.

On the home front, two of the Champions League contenders, Milan and Juventus, gave an emphatic demonstration of their well-being when providing arguably the best game of the season so far – a thrilling 2-1 Milan win at the San Siro. Milan are not always consistent in Serie A, especially when facing so-called 'minor' sides (such as Udinese and Perugia, who both beat them this spring). Yet the current Milanello unit is the sort of side that will always rise to the big occasion.

Talent such as Andrii Shevchenko, Filippo Inzaghi, Rui Costa, Rivaldo, Andrea Pirlo, Paolo Maldini *et al* may not always be in the mood to grind out a result away to such as feisty little Reggina (0-0 in mid-March), but bring on Juventus, Inter, Bayern Munich etc and they tend to stand up and be counted.

To a large extent, the Milan-Juventus game on March 22 was a 'do or die' occasion. Juventus went into it top of the table, three points ahead of second-placed Inter but fully eight points clear of Milan. A Milan defeat would have effectively put them out of the championship race since they would have been 11 points adrift of Juventus with just eight games to play.

In a game in which both sides took the contest to the other, it was perhaps only the brilliance of Milan's Brazilian goalkeeper, Dida, that ensured the vital three points for his side. After a whirlwind start and three brilliant goals in the opening 25 minutes, from Shevchenko, Alessio Tacchinardi and then Inzaghi, Dida headed off a determined second-half Juventus fightback, denying great efforts from Uruguayan striker Marcelo Zalayeta and Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved.

For Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti, the object of some ridiculous criticism because of poor performances in meaningless second phase Champions League ties against Real Madrid and Borussia Dortmund, the win was a timely boost. For Juventus, far from disgraced in defeat, it was their first loss after an 11-match Serie A run in which they had won 10 and drawn one.

From the neutral viewpoint, this was the best possible result because it keeps alive the possibility that the title contest could remain a three-horse race right down to the wire. That is, of course, if Inter ever manage to hit a streak of convincing, consistent form. Not for the first time since Argentinian coach Hector Cuper arrived at the club in summer 2001, Inter continue to give the impression of a team where the quality of the collective game falls a long way short of the potential of the squad's brilliant individual parts.

Confidence builder...Roberto Mancini

Four days after Inter earned their Champions League quarter-final berth with an at times laboured performance in a 2-0 win against hapless Bayer Leverkusen, Cuper's men were offered a golden chance to go back joint top of the table with Juventus the day after that Milan win.

If ever there was a match to win, it was away to Udinese. Strangely, though, there was only one side at the Friuli stadium that looked hungry, motivated, self-confident and 'up for it' – namely, Udinese. In the end, Inter were flattered by a 2-1 defeat.

In the aftermath, much critical attention was focused on Cuper's tactics. In particular, with the game clearly slipping away from his side at 2-0, his only substitution, that of Paraguayan central defender Carlos Gamarra for debutant youngster Nicola Napolitano, defied belief.

Four days earlier, it had seemed that a new 'star' had been born when 18-year-old Nigerian youth team striker Obafemi Martins had pulled Inter's chestnuts out of the fire when not only leading the line against Leverkusen but also scoring the vital opening goal, as well as winning a penalty and creating at least two other clear chances.

As Inter struggled in Udine, as one-time Argentinian talisman Gabriel Batistuta for the umpteenth time proved that his top-level career is definitively, irrevocably and irredeemably over, Cuper continued to chain-smoke nervously on the sidelines. Worse still, he continued to ignore an apparently obvious substitution such as Martins.

Hands off...Gianluca Pessotto of Juventus attempts to block Milan's Andrea Pirlo during the top-of-the-table clash at San Siro

Before the season is out, both Cuper and Inter will have some glorious opportunities to prove their critics wrong. Suffice to say, though, that, based on what your correspondent has seen, they have no chance of winning the Champions League or the Serie A title.

That defeat by Udinese inevitably set the speculation windmills blowing, with Inter striker Christian Vieri rumoured to be fed up with Cuper and with the club itself allegedly having sounded out Lazio coach, Roberto Mancini, as Cuper's replacement next season.

As always, such rumours may contain a small grain of truth. Certainly, Cuper and Vieri have not seen eye to eye this season on a number of occasions, ranging from Ronaldo's move to Real Madrid down to the needless yellow card picked up by Vieri in Inter's home Champions League draw with Newcastle that ruled him out of the all-vital final group game with Leverkusen.

If Inter were to defy us and win something, such problems as exist between Cuper and Vieri would soon be forgotten. In the meantime, however, it is hardly surprising that the top clubs have cast a longing eye on the coaching ability of Mancini.

His Lazio continue to be the biggest surprise of the season. Rather than plodding through the undistinguished mid-table year for which they seemed destined, they have deservedly remained in the Champions League zone in Serie A and also, as mentioned above, gone all the way to the UEFA Cup semi-finals. Throughout all this, too, Lazio have played splendid football.

Mancini's greatest achievement remains the extent to which he has rebuilt the confidence of players like Argentinian Claudio Lopez, Italian Stefano Fiore, Serb Dejan Stankovic and Brazilian Cesar, all now playing the best football of their careers. Success, either via Champions League qualification or in the UEFA Cup, would be a fitting reward for a season played out against the background of financial uncertainty over the club's ownership.

At press time, Gianmarco Calleri, who guided Lazio in the mid-1980s, is reportedly putting together a consortium that will include financier Roberto Colannino (former head of Olivetti) and Milan businessman Salvatore Ligresti. The intention is to buy out a majority shareholding, currently held by Sergio Cragnotti through his cash-strapped Cirio Group. Not surprisingly, the biggest obstacle to the departure of Cragnotti concerns the disputed value of his shareholding.

Given the quality of Lazio's football this season, however, if and when Cragnotti is bought out, a new owner or consortium of owners is sure to be found by those creditor banks that have temporarily taken over the running of the club.

While Lazio have their troubles, things are not much better for city rivals Roma, who seem headed for their worst season in years. Humiliated in a second phase Champions League group, where they picked up just one win and two draws in six games, Roma now have only the Italian Cup and a possible UEFA Cup qualification in Serie A as seasonal objectives.

Inter discovery...Obafemi Martins

Their Italian Cup campaign, however, could provide some bitter-sweet satisfaction since Roma go into the second leg of their semi-final with Lazio 2-1 up from the first leg. Given the obsessive nature of Roman soccer rivalry, the elimination of Lazio could make up for a lot of earlier grief.

Whether lifting the Italian Cup might prove enough to see Fabio Capello confirmed as coach for next season remains to be seen. Not surprisingly, his future has been the object of a constant flurry of speculation, with reports suggesting that Roma have already contacted Perugia's eminently successful coach, Serse Cosmi.

Pro-file Clarence Seedorf

Dutchman aiming for unique Champions League hat-trick

SOME day soon, Clarence Seedorf may become the subject of a pub quiz question. If the Dutchman were to win the Champions League with his current club, Milan, he would write himself into history books as the first player to win it three times with three different clubs.

Still only 27, Seedorf has already been around the track a number of times, winning the Champions Cup with Ajax in 1995 and three years later with Real Madrid.

In between, he not only played a season in Serie A with Sampdoria (1995-96) but also won a Spanish League title in his first year in Madrid the following season.

The Seedorf run of success dried up, however, after his £14million move back to Italy in January 2000 to play for the other Milan club, Internazionale, then coached by Marcello Lippi. At first, the money seemed more than well spent since Seedorf marked his Serie A return with a goal in a 5-0 romp against Perugia.

But Lippi was replaced the following season by Marco Tardelli, who in turn gave way to the current coach, Argentinian Hector Cuper. For much of last season, Cuper gave the impression he did not rate Seedorf, who was regularly asked to play out of position, wide on the left. Despite that, he often proved brilliantly effective, never more so than when hitting two stunning long-range goals to secure a 2-2 draw in a top-of-the-table clash with Juventus.

Even so, Cuper continued to ignore him, especially towards the end of the season. A last day 4-2 defeat by Lazio blew Inter's title chances and Seedorf was among those sacrificed. For £12.5m, he was on his way across town to Milanello. But that proved no trauma. As someone who has built a football school for deprived children in his native Surinam, Seedorf long ago learned there are more important things in life. So far, Inter's loss has been Milan's gain. Still in left midfield, but not nearly so wide, he has become an integral part of the team.

He believes Milan's attacking game suits him just fine, saying: "We always want to play good football but want to be effective too. That way, you get the right results more easily."

Seedorf was hailed Holland's best player in a 1-0 win over Argentina in February. Watch out for more "right results" from Seedorf, Holland and Milan.

Paddy Agnew

Fact file

Club Milan (Ita)
Country Holland
Born April 1, 1976, in Paramaribo, Surinam
Previous clubs Ajax, Sampdoria (Ita), Real Madrid (Spa), Internazionale (Ita)
International debut December 1994, v Luxembourg
International caps 62 (11 goals)
Honours Champions League 1995 (Ajax), 1998 (Real Madrid); World Club Cup 1998; Dutch League 1994, 1995; Spanish League 1997; Dutch Cup 1993

Bayern pitch perfect

...but the off-field Kirch controversy rumbles on. Nick Bidwell reports

BAYERN MUNICH vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was not merely talking a good game when describing his team's springtime performances as being close to perfect. The Bavarians are on course to win the Bundesliga title by the largest margin since three points for a victory was adopted – the current record is 15 established by Bayern in 1998-99. The club are also on course for their second domestic Double in three years, having reached the German Cup Final.

Although Bayern fans may not have turned out in great numbers for recent home Cup ties, the players showed considerably more enthusiasm for the competition, humbling runaway Second Division leaders Koln 8-0 in the quarter-finals and strolling to a 3-1 semi-final victory over a Bayer Leverkusen side so obviously distracted by their relegation worries. For the Final in Berlin on May 31, Bayern will start favourites against Kaiserslautern, who beat Werder Bremen 3-0 in the other semi.

However, Ottmar Hitzfeld's side would do well to take care. Since the winter break the *Lauterer* have been one of the form teams in the country, and while they have not completely guaranteed their Bundesliga survival following a disastrous start, they are certainly breathing more easily.

Not that all is going according to plan for Bayern at the moment. Outstanding midfielder Michael Ballack faces a battle to play again this term after tearing ankle ligaments; keeper Oliver Kahn is still tabloid fodder thanks to the unfortunate juxtaposition of his affair and his wife's pregnancy; while the club continue to feel the heat from the revelations of their exclusive contract with the troubled Kirch group, a hitherto secret deal that brought them £14 million and drove a coach and horses through the Bundesliga's collective agreement for the sharing of TV money.

As the German League (DFL) investigates the matter, Bayern have opted for a 'good cop, bad cop' defence strategy. The urbane Rummenigge is the voice of reason, attempting to soothe the hurt sensibilities of the authorities and other clubs, while general manager Uli Hoeness takes a hawkish, scattergun line. "For me, it's only a trifle," blasted Hoeness in typical confrontational vein. "We can't be accused of anything. We paid tax on every penny we received and we were not required to report the source of our revenues in any great detail. We don't have to do any more than provide an accurate total.

"Magazines [*Manager* and *Stern*] have somehow acquired documents belonging to us, and these people who like to comment on what is moral and immoral should stop and think whether everything that happened here was above board. This is white-collar crime. Magazines have illegally obtained access to contracts and documents that have nothing to do with them. The documents were deposited with the German Football League and certain banks, which we were required to do to secure financing for our new stadium.

"In future, the League will have to come to us to see our contracts. They will not leave our sight."

The clear inference was that Hoeness believed the leaks to come from the DFL – who immediately demanded a retraction and apology from the Bayern supremo. They may have to wait a long time, though.

So how will Bayern be punished, if at all, should the DFL not be satisfied with the answers it is given on the Kirch affair? Some believe points may be deducted from the club this season or that they will be stripped of their 2000 and 2001 Bundesliga titles. A much more realistic outcome is a fine, a penalty that financial powerhouse Bayern should absorb with ease.

Just as damaging to the reputation of German football has been the failure of their sides in Europe this season. In their worst overall performance for nearly two decades, not one Bundesliga side managed to reach the quarter-finals of either the Champions League or UEFA Cup, proof to some that the state of grace created by the national team's achievements at the World Cup had long since evaporated.

Ex-Germany midfielder Bernd Schuster opined that German clubs did not possess enough world-class foreign players, while national team boss Rudi Voller and Stuttgart coach Felix Magath claimed the wipeout was only a temporary downturn.

The 'crisis, what crisis?' view does have some mileage. Dortmund, for example, were unlucky to find themselves in a difficult Champions League second phase group alongside Milan and Real Madrid and might even have reached the last eight if they had not conceded a 92nd-minute equaliser in the 1-1 home draw with Real.

"We had chances to double our lead, but as the time ticked away, we instinctively began to sit back to try to hold on to what we had," said Dortmund defender Christoph Metzelder. "We saw Jens Lehmann was having a great game in goal and we thought we could hold on. We should have been more intelligent."

Meanwhile, a number of Bundesliga teams have opted for or have been forced into a change of leadership. Wolfgang Wolf was succeeded by ex-Hertha Berlin boss Jurgen Rober at Wolfsburg; a 5-0 derby loss against Bayern and 6-0 thumping by Hertha cost Peter Pacult his job at 1860 Munich, where he was replaced by Falko Gotz; and veteran Dutchman Hans Meyer threw in the towel at struggling Borussia Monchengladbach, making way for former Duisburg, Hansa Rostock and Koln coach Ewald Lienen.

A flying winger for Gladbach in the 1970s and 80s, Lienen is one of those players who was never expected to turn to coaching. As a player, he was the perfect maverick, long-haired, dishevelled, individualistic and an outspoken Communist. But how he has changed, transformed into a suit-and-tie tactician who demands the utmost discipline both on and off the pitch. What was that about leopards and spots?

Relentless...Bayern celebrate a goal against Bayer Leverkusen in the Cup

Talking it over...Fernandez (right) with Monaco coach Didier Deschamps

Fernandez prepares to say farewell

Hooligan outburst the last straw for PSG coach, writes Andre Duclos

LUIS FERNANDEZ has announced that whatever happens hereafter to Paris Saint-Germain, he will be on his way at the end of the season. This was right after PSG had confounded his and their critics with a resounding 3-0 win at Marseille, then joint top of the table.

On the previous weekend, the 'hooligan' end of the Parc des Princes subjected Fernandez in particular and the team in general to sustained abuse and even the prospect of violence after a broken-backed display against Troyes. PSG won 4-2, but only after their relegation-threatened opponents had taken a 2-0 lead.

At least PSG reached the French Cup semi-finals with a 1-0 win at National (Third Division) Martigues. They were joined by Bordeaux, 2-0 victors against Second Division Lorient, Rennes, who struggled to beat Alsace part-timers Schiltigheim 2-1, and Auxerre, 4-2 winners on penalties after a 0-0 draw with another Third Division side, Angouleme.

Former international Eric Roy has played a salient part in the impressive showing of promoted Nice this season following his return to the club where he made his name.

Roy had become a free agent last summer and went back to Nice to train on his own. Club president Maurice Cohen was happy to accommodate him, while Gernot Rohr, the team's German manager, was not only glad to see him but after the first general training session asked him if he would sign on for the season. Which, of course, he did.

"For me," says Roy, "it was the ideal solution." Needless to say, it has worked out pretty well for Nice, too.

The midfielder concedes he has been a late developer. "Because of financial problems which didn't help my development," he says, "I could not really express myself in a strong team until I was 26. It was only at Lyon that I could think of nothing but football.

"It is obvious that if I had not lost two or three years, my career would have been different. But I have no regrets about that, and it didn't stop me going to Marseille."

As for Lyon, Brazilian midfielder Juninho admits that the team have their limitations. "To have such an attacking team," he says, "and to create so few chances raises many questions, to which I have no answer."

In fact, although compatriot forward Sonny Anderson is starting to find the net for Lyon, Juninho is one of the club's main sources of goals. Like his namesake at Middlesbrough, he is an adept taker of free-kicks, and his accuracy has put him among the top scorers in the championship this season.

In lively form, meanwhile, even if his club has, by and large, had a disappointing season, is Lens striker Daniel Moreira. The 25-year-old has certainly been one of the best players in the League, not least with his display against Montpellier when he scored twice in two minutes.

Pro-file Jerome Rothen

Wing wonder set to fly from financial mess at Monaco

AT A TIME when their Monte Carlo bank truly is broken, Monaco face losing a number of star turns, among them high-flying midfielder Jerome Rothen.

The Monegasques' former financial solidity has been eroded by their absence from European competition for the past two years and a massive wage bill – reported to be £2 million a month. Now with staggering debts of £35m, it appears to be time to recoup as much as possible by selling their prize assets.

There should be no shortage of takers for 25-year-old Rothen, who is a good bet to be the French League Player of the Season and surely close to a first call-up for France. His pugnacious left-flank play, quick feet and excellent crossing ability make him a permanent threat to any defence, and Monaco would certainly not be pushing for the League title without him.

Rothen has already been a target for Alain Perrin, coach of title rivals Marseille and his former boss at Troyes. Having failed to get his man during the winter break, Perrin has not yet given up hope of luring him to the Stade Velodrome this summer. However, Italy, Spain or England are much more likely destinations.

Rothen already seems to be practising his farewell speech. "I'm happy at Monaco," he says. "I'm under contract until 2006. But I'm also well aware that in a week I could be somewhere else. That's football. We'll have to wait and see. It was always my intention to play for a top French side before going abroad. That's my career plan, and at the moment I'm following it to the letter."

Rothen is used to being in demand. Little more than a year ago, there was a similar rush for his services following a string of fine InterToto and UEFA Cup displays for Troyes. Arsenal, Lyon, Nantes, Rennes, Udinese and Venezia were all knocking on his door, only for negotiations to become bogged down as two agents argued over the right to represent him. The matter was eventually resolved but it was Monaco who cut through the mess to sign him for £3m.

"Monaco are a big-name club and have a squad full of great players," says Rothen, a product of the national football academy at Clairefontaine. "It seemed the ideal place to win trophies and make me a better player. But we never got going in the second half of last season. We had a lot of injuries, lacked confidence and 15th place was what we deserved. Our team has hardly changed since then, but it is a completely different Monaco. No one is carrying injuries and we're no longer playing with fear.

"We realise a club like ours must be in the top four or five at least, and with results going our way, we're starting to talk about the title at last."

Nick Bidwell

Fact file

Club **Monaco**
Country **France**
Born **March 31, 1978, in Chatenay**
Previous clubs **Caen, Troyes**

Leeds show Venables the door

The Elland Road saga takes a new twist. Gavin Hamilton reports

Leeds disunited...Venables has paid the price for the club's slump

JUST as we thought that events at Leeds United could not take any more dramatic turns, Terry Venables was sacked as manager and replaced, until the end of the season at least, by former Sunderland boss Peter Reid.

Venables paid the price for an alarming slump which saw Leeds dumped out of the FA Cup by First Division Sheffield United and hovering two places outside the relegation zone with eight matches remaining.

Venables, 60, was known to be desperately unhappy at the sale of six international players – Rio Ferdinand, Robbie Keane, Lee Bowyer, Olivier Dacourt, Robbie Fowler and Jonathan Woodgate – since taking over at Elland Road last summer.

Woodgate's departure in January pushed Venables close to resignation, but he stayed, aware that Leeds were unlikely to sack him given the fat two-year, £4million deal they had agreed last July.

Despite the departures, Venables still had many good players left, not least England internationals Alan Smith, Danny Mills and Paul Robinson, as well as the Australians Harry Kewell and Mark Viduka.

A coach of Venables' reputation should have been able to work with the resources at his disposal, reasoned under-fire chairman Peter Ridsdale and the Leeds board, who duly announced his sacking.

As speculation mounted about Venables' departure, it had widely been assumed assistant managers Brian Kidd and Eddie Gray would take over until the end of the season. So there was widespread astonishment at the appointment of Reid.

At Sunderland, Reid was widely considered to have done a good job in difficult circumstances until being sacked last October after seven years in the job. Reid had been replaced by the FA's technical director Howard Wilkinson, working in tandem with the young and highly-rated manager of Stoke, Steve Cotterill.

But last month, with Sunderland stuck at the bottom of the Premier League, both were sacked and the former Republic of Ireland manager Mick McCarthy installed.

McCarthy was said to have been the original choice of Sunderland chairman Bob Murray to replace Reid back in October. When Murray telephoned Wilkinson to canvass his opinion of McCarthy, Wilkinson is said to have put himself forward.

McCarthy has little chance of saving the club from relegation. Their position looks untenable, as does that of West Brom. West Ham and Bolton look like battling the third relegation spot, although both Birmingham and Leeds will be looking nervously over their shoulders.

At the top of the table, both Arsenal and Liverpool were left to focus on domestic matters after disappointing exits from Europe.

Arsenal paid the price for failing to win any of their three home games in the Champions League second phase when they were beaten 2-1 in Valencia. Arsene Wenger's claims that his team were on the verge of European success will not have gone unnoticed in Manchester, where United know a thing or two about fat ladies and singing lessons.

Arsenal's failure to reach the Champions League quarter-finals indicates that they still have a lot to learn about playing quality opposition. However, Liverpool seem to have regressed from the team that won five trophies two seasons ago and looked set to tilt for the League title.

Defeat by Celtic in the UEFA Cup left them chasing the tails of Everton and Chelsea for the fourth Champions League spot. Only Steven Gerrard emerged with credit from the games with the Scottish champions, and Gerard Houllier still has much work to do if Liverpool are to challenge Arsenal and Manchester United.

Newcastle seem far better placed to make such a challenge. Under Bobby Robson, former England captain Alan Shearer has scored freely, though his goals were not enough to take them through a tough Champions League group. But Shearer's form has been impressive enough for England coach Sven Goran Eriksson to express an interest in him returning to the fold.

Shearer hinted he "could still do a job" for England, but on further reflection insisted he would not go back on his original decision to retire from international football.

Head down...Thierry Henry takes on Valencia's defence at Mestalla

SCOTLAND

Hartson hands it to Rangers

THE CIS Insurance League Cup Final ended in drama when a last-minute penalty miss by Celtic's John Hartson handed Rangers the first silverware of the Scottish season. They ran out 2-1 winners from an incident-packed game at Hampden Park, giving them some revenge for a League defeat eight days earlier. Ironically, Hartson had been the hero of that game, scoring the only goal at Parkhead.

Rangers took a 2-0 lead at Hampden with first-half goals from Claudio Caniggia and Peter Lovenkrands. A Henrik Larsson goal gave Celtic hope but Hartson's miss proved to be his side's final chance of an equaliser.

Rangers' victory kept alive the prospect of a domestic treble in Alex McLeish's first full season in charge. Celtic bounced back from defeat to triumph over Liverpool in the UEFA Cup, but then crashed out of the Scottish Cup at the quarter-final stage, going down 1-0 to First Division Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

Aberdeen's attempts to retain top-flight status were overshadowed by revelations that recently-appointed manager Steve Paterson has an alcohol addiction. The Pittodrie board, who recruited Paterson from Inverness Caledonian Thistle as a replacement for Dane Ebbe Skovdahl earlier this season, has said it will give him every help in addressing his problem.

Motherwell and Dundee United, the sides most likely to fill the one relegation berth, could well be saved should Falkirk win the First Division. Under Premier League rules, only clubs with an all-seated stadium capacity of at least 10,000 can be admitted to the top flight. The antiquated Brockville home of First Division leaders Falkirk falls some way short.

Alan Fairley

Oh, no John...Hartson puts his last-minute penalty wide

WALES

Ton flatten Oswestry

SECOND level Ton Pentre provided the upset of the Welsh Cup quarter-finals when they beat top-flight strugglers Oswestry 3-0. Ton will next meet Cwmbran, who beat high-fliers Bangor City 5-3 on penalties after a goalless draw.

Holders Barry left it late at Aberystwyth, two goals in the last six minutes giving them a dramatic 3-2 win. Their last-four opponents are Rhyl, who beat Connah's Quay Nomads 1-0.

Mel Thomas

N IRELAND

Linfield lose at the last

LINFIELD'S last chance of silverware this season was ended when they lost to a last-minute goal in the Cup quarter-final at Omagh. Defeat came with David Jeffrey's side in the wake of runaway League leaders Glentoran with just a handful of games to play.

Omagh next play Coleraine, 2-0 winners over struggling Crusaders, while Glentoran, 1-0 victors away to Ards, have been pitted against Portadown, who thrashed near neighbours Glenavon 5-0.

Roy Kitson

Mido in the wilderness

The Egyptian striker has been ousted at Ajax, writes Klaas-Jan Droppert

HOLLAND

THE curtain has fallen for Ahmed 'Mido' Hossam at Ajax. Coach Ronald Koeman has lost patience with and faith in the Egyptian striker, sending him on loan to Celta Vigo in Spain for the rest of the season. FIFA sanctioned the move, which took place outside the transfer window, after hearing representations from both clubs.

Koeman took his decision after expelling Mido from the squad for the fourth time this season. The Egyptian was banished to Ajax's reserves for disciplinary reasons days before a Champions League game against Arsenal, but was reprieved after some first-team colleagues requested his presence. However, the final straw for Koeman came after the game when Mido went on camera to deny any wrongdoing in the first place.

In the League, PSV's 2-0 home defeat of Ajax, their closest challengers, at the end of March put them within sight of their third championship in four years. Mateja Kezman's double strike gave them a 10-point lead with nine games to play. The Double is also a possibility after PSV made it through to the Cup semi-finals to face Utrecht. Ajax meet Feyenoord in the other tie.

Financially-troubled Utrecht have agreed to sell leading striker Dirk Kuijt to Feyenoord. Meanwhile, nearly-bankrupt Vitesse are sliding towards the relegation zone after seven consecutive defeats. Coach Mike Snoei offered to resign but the board said it could not afford to replace him.

The run-up to Holland's Euro 2004 qualifier against the Czech Republic was overshadowed by revelations of a bust-up between midfielders Edgar Davids and Mark Van Bommel after the match against Austria in October. Davids was not amused when Van Bommel accused him of neglecting his left-flank place in order to play in the middle.

Banished...Mido has angered Koeman once too often

Brugge blaster...Aruna Dindane

BELGIUM

Anderlecht put brakes on runaway Brugge

THE title should still be a formality for Club Brugge but the beginning of the run-in didn't quite go according to plan for Trond Sollied's side. A week after the shock 2-1 home defeat by relegation-threatened Charleroi came the embarrassing 5-1 reverse at closest challengers Anderlecht, who thereby cut the gap on the leaders to 11 points with eight matches left.

Few argued with Sollied's claim that his team were unrecognisable from the side that have dominated the League this season. But that was to take a little credit away from Anderlecht, whose fourth successive victory was probably their best display of the campaign. Aruna Dindane, who completed their scoring, was man of the match, eclipsing even two-goal marksman Nenad Jestrovic.

At least Brugge preserved their record of having scored in every League match, courtesy of Nastja Ceh's first-half equaliser.

The hostility between the clubs was confirmed the moment Alin Stoica, once an Anderlecht favourite, came on as a Brugge substitute with the hosts 4-1 up. The Romanian was whistled mercilessly every time he touched the ball.

Lommel, who inflicted one of Brugge's few other defeats this season, in the Cup, will start next season in the Third Division after becoming the fifth Belgian club in less than two years to go into liquidation. Should Lommel, who have followed the path taken by Harelbeke, Eendracht Aalst, RWD Molenbeek and Mechelen, finish above the relegation zone at the end of this season, next term's top flight will consist of only 17 clubs.

Davy De Beule, Lokeren's 21-year-old left-sided midfielder, was the only uncapped player called up for the Euro 2004 qualifier in Croatia. De Beule, often the only Belgian in Lokeren's multi-national side, found himself in a national squad lacking both Anderlecht's central midfielder Yves Vanderhaeghe, who is out for the rest of the season following a knee operation, and injured striker Mbo Mpenza.

Nicholas Harling

PORTUGAL

Sporting crumble in the Cup

SPORTING LISBON'S chequered season took a turn for the worse following a humiliating home Cup quarter-final defeat at the hands of Second Division Naval 1° de Maio. Last season's Double winners lost their grip on the trophy when Coste scored the only goal on the hour.

In the League, two draws and a defeat during March mean Sporting can almost certainly wave goodbye to the League title too. With eight games remaining they trailed leaders FC Porto by a massive 20 points.

In the other Cup quarter-finals, Porto kept themselves on course for the Double as they thrashed Varzim 7-0, Pacos Ferreira beat Vitoria Setubal 2-1, and Uniao Leiria overcame Academica 3-1.

Porto put themselves in an apparently unassailable position in the League when beating closest challengers Benfica 1-0 in early March with a goal from Deco in what was scheduled to be the penultimate game at the Stadium of Light. Subsequent victories over Uniao Leiria and Nacional maintained Porto's 13-point lead over Benfica.

Luis Campos, sacked by Setubal in February, made a rapid return to management when handed the reins at Varzim. Jose Alberto Costa made way following the side's 2-1 defeat at Gil Vicente in early March, which left them battling against relegation.

Maritimo, also fighting the drop, were set to appoint former Russian national coach Anatoly Bishovets to replace Nelo Vingada.

Tickets for the Euro 2004 finals will go on sale from April 28. The news came shortly after the tournament schedule was unveiled by UEFA. Portugal play the opening match at FC Porto's reconfigured Das Antas stadium, their second group game at the new Stadium of Light in Lisbon and their third at Sporting's Jose Alvalade ground.

Alberto da Silva

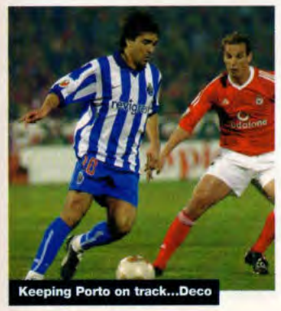
SWITZERLAND

Servette move out Morinini

SERVETTE'S move to their new 30,000-seater Stade de Geneve got off to an inauspicious start when they fired coach Roberto Morinini after a run of poor results.

Morinini was never at ease at the financially-troubled club, whom he joined from Lugano at the start of the season to replace Lucien Favre.

Basle's hopes of a successful title defence were dented when they were beaten 3-1 away by Neuchatel Xamax in their first championship play-off game. Winter champions Grasshopper took advantage of the slip by beating Young Boys 4-0 and going on to win their next two games to establish a four-point lead over Basle. The Zurich side kept Basle at bay on the fourth matchday, holding them to a 2-2 draw.


Keeping Porto on track...Deco

Uruguayan midfielder Richard Nunez hit four of Grasshopper's nine goals in the three wins to go to the top of the national scorers' chart with 17. Grasshopper's Argentinian signing, Fernando Gamboa from Chacarita Juniors, made a dream debut, scoring the opening goal against Young Boys after six minutes.

Ivar von Rulach

AUSTRIA

Salzburg feel the difference

AUSTRIA SALZBURG said goodbye to grass when they entertained Karnten in a Bundesliga match in early March.

The game, a 1-1 draw, was played on an artificial surface as part of a UEFA experiment into possible replacements for turf. Salzburg are one of four European clubs, along with Torpedo Moscow, Sweden's Orebro and Turkey's Denizlispor, taking part in the experiment.

Meanwhile, Austria Wien closed in on their first championship for 10 years with a 2-1 win at Bregenz. This put them 13 points clear at the top.

Ben Christopher

REP OF IRELAND

Dolan faces old club on first day back

MANAGER Pat Dolan, who quit St Patrick's Athletic for Cork City during the close season, will face his old club in the opening game of the new season, which kicks off on April 11. After a short transitional season the Eircom League has now switched to a summer season, running to the end of November, with a two-week break in June. Dolan's first signing was Kevin Doyle from his old club.

After the departure of Dolan, St Pat's announced that they were going professional, following the example of two other Dublin clubs – Bohemians and Shelbourne.

Mick McCarthy will be back in charge of an Irish side this summer. The former national team coach has agreed to manage the Irish team at the first Homeless Street Soccer World Championship, which will be held in Graz, Austria, from July 5-14.

Sean Creedon

LIECHTENSTEIN

Vaduz player killed in car crash

TRAGEDY struck FC Vaduz just two days before the start of their Swiss League promotion play-off campaign when new signing Marzio Morocutti died and midfielder Vaidotas Slekys was seriously injured after their car collided with a bus near Balzers.

Morocutti, just days away from his 30th birthday, had joined Vaduz from Swiss side Bellinzona only a few weeks before as a replacement for top scorer Moreno Merenda, now at St Gallen. He leaves a widow and a four-year-old daughter. With Vaduz in mourning, their opening match at SC Kriens was postponed.

Graeme Crawford

Pro-file Timmy Simons

Down to earth but the height of consistency for Club Brugge

GOOD news for Club Brugge fans. Defensive midfielder Timmy Simons, the 2002 Belgian Player of the Year, will not be leaving after all.

There was much talk in Germany during the winter break that Simons featured on Schalke's wish-list, and Simons himself was quoted as being keen on a move to the Bundesliga. But Brugge had no intention of losing a player whose tactical awareness, endeavour and unflappable temperament have played such a large part in the team's omnipotence in the Belgian League this season.

A threat to inform FIFA of an alleged illegal approach was sufficient to force a Schalke retreat, and within weeks agreement was reached with Simons to add another three years to his contract. The midfielder is now committed to the Flemish club until summer 2008. Although exact figures were not made public, it is thought to be the biggest deal in Brugge's history, but the *Blauw-Zwart* (Blue and Blacks) will feel it was worth every penny.

Once described by ex-Belgium boss Robert Waseige as "the sort of player every coach dreams of working with", Simons is a paragon of consistency and never seems to be injured. Since arriving from Lommel in summer 2000 he has been a first-team constant and recently clocked up his 100th consecutive Belgian League game.

Such qualities prompted those asked to elect Belgium's Player of the Year for 2002 – the top-flight coaches, federation representatives, sportswriters and referees – to vote for Simons ahead of Genk striker Wesley Sonck and evergreen St Truiden midfielder Danny Boffin.

Funny how Club Brugge winners of the award are always solid, down-to-earth types. Both attacking great Jan Ceulemans and midfield linchpin Franky Van der Elst were known for their unassuming ways. Simons is cut from the same cloth.

"I was a little surprised to be Player of the Year," admitted the 26-year-old. "As a striker and a playmaker, Sonck and Boffin had more opportunities to do the spectacular and be appreciated in the media than a defensive midfielder like me. I hope people won't start treating me differently now. I'm not worth more than anyone else. They mustn't expect the extraordinary. I won't be scoring 15 goals a season."

What you see is what you get. Discipline, enthusiasm and adaptability come naturally to Simons. Such is his versatility that Belgium coach Aime Anthuenis has opted to play him in central defence, saying: "Simons has the football brain and strong personality to be the leader of our defence for a long time."

Nick Bidwell

Fact file

Club **Club Brugge**
Country **Belgium**
Born **December 11, 1976, in Diest**
Previous clubs **Diest, Lommel**
International debut **April 2001, v Czech Republic**
International caps **21 (0 goals)**
Honours **Belgian Cup 2002**

CROSSWORD mitre

WIN a top-quality Mitre football

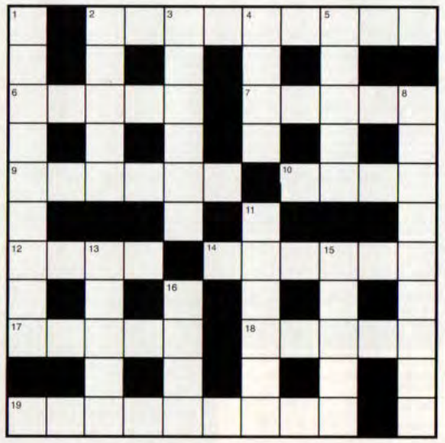
Mitre has kindly donated a top-quality football as first prize for this month's crossword. The first correct entry selected at random after May 9 will win the ball. Five runners-up will each win a *World Soccer Yearbook*. SEND YOUR ENTRY TO: MAY CROSSWORD, *World Soccer*, King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS.

ACROSS
2 Young Chilean midfielder in form at Brazil's Sao Paulo (9)
6 Guinea defender at Bayern Munich (5)
7 Ex-Belgian international who resigned this season as Mechelen's coach (5)
9 Reigning club champions of Ecuador (6)
10 Brazilian defender at Bayer Leverkusen (4)
12 Portuguese midfielder at Atletico Madrid (4)
14 Vitesse winger lured to Ajax by Ronald Koeman (6)
17 Christian Gimenez's fellow Argentinian forward at Basle (5)
18 Welsh midfield stalwart at Newcastle United (5)
19 Sporting Lisbon star who blotted his Portugal copybook at last year's World Cup (4,5)

DOWN
1 Promising 22-year-old Borussia Dortmund and Germany defender (9)
2 ----- Road, ground about to be vacated by Manchester City (5)
3 Belgian town in which the Stedelijk stadium is sited (6)
4 Former Verona defender who joined Lazio in 2002 (4)
5 Argentinian playmaker in Spain with Valencia (5)
8 French forward who left Sunderland for Bastia last year (9)
11 PSV Eindhoven's Australian midfielder (6)
13 £20million defender of Milan and Italy (5)
15 Right-back at Atletico Madrid (5)
16 Senegalese hero whose club sides include Grasshopper and Lens (4)

MARCH SOLUTION
Across: 1 Nacional, 7 Campi, 8 Cauet, 9 Kreek, 10 Cole, 13 Hong, 14 Sedan, 17 Rosso, 18 Li Tie, 19 Balitsch.
Down: 1 Neca, 2 Camoranesi, 3 Oliseh, 4 Arce, 5 Vittek, 6 Nuno Santos, 11 Thuram, 12 Derlei, 15 Roma, 16 Cech.

MARCH WINNERS
1st prize: James Lander, Wigmore, Kent.
5 runners-up: Steven Smith, Cork, Rep of Ireland; Darius Huynh, Buffalo, USA; Munira Marta Silaui, El-Matn, Lebanon; Arild Sandven, Slependen, Norway; Sean McClure, Santa Monica, USA.



NAME
ADDRESS
POSTCODE
MAY (photocopied coupons are acceptable)

Beat us if you can, say Rosenborg

Sigurd Odegaard on the defending champions' confidence ahead of the new season

Feeling champion...Rosenborg skipper Eric Hoftun

NORWAY

CHAMPIONS Rosenborg were in upbeat mood ahead of the League kick-off in April after going through their 12 pre-season games unbeaten.

"I don't think we've ever been better, and for periods we have been playing excellent attacking football," said midfielder Roar Strand following a 3-1 win over Brann in Rosenborg's full-size indoor arena. "We simply look unbeatable," added veteran captain Eric Hoftun.

The Trondheim club have sold South African midfielder MacBeth Sibaya to Russian club Rubin after he failed to settle since his arrival last August. Indeed, coach Aage Hareide has claimed Rosenborg will no longer buy African players simply because the difference in culture is too great.

"Sibaya gave 100 per cent in training but still never managed to become a regular," said the coach. "It just took him too much time to adjust to our style."

Christer George and Arni Arason have turned down contract extensions with Rosenborg, opting to leave on free transfers at the end of the season.

Roger Albertsen, scorer of Norway's first goal in their famous 2-1 World Cup qualifying defeat of England in 1981, has died at the age of just 45. Albertsen's career took him to clubs in Belgium, Holland and Greece, becoming the only Norwegian to win a Greek championship medal during his time with Olympiakos. He finished his career at Rosenborg in the late 1980s and was capped 25 times.

SWEDEN

Santos stays at Helsingborgs

HELSINGBORGS have managed to hang on to star Brazilian marksman Alvaro Santos despite their recent flirtation with bankruptcy, an outcome that means they can retain hopes of a League title challenge.

Santos has been trailed by a number of European clubs, while there has also been talk of a return to his former Brazilian club, America. But the forward, who finished runner-up in the Swedish League scoring chart last year, decided to stay with Helsingborgs. "Going back to Brazil is out of the question," says Santos. "I am still only 23 and want to pursue a career in Europe. I have committed myself to helping Helsingborgs to success."

Santos has an impressive scoring record in Sweden – 33 goals in 61 League matches – but he faces a strong challenge for the golden boot this term from compatriot Alfonso, now at Orgryte, and Djurgardens' Johan Elmander, who scored three goals in Sweden's victorious King's Cup campaign in Thailand in February.

Last season's top scorer, Peter Ijeh of Malmo, is likely to be sidelined until June because of a leg injury.

Djurgardens midfielder Magnus Pehrsson's playing career is over after failing to overcome a knee injury.

Pentti Hietanen

DENMARK

Copenhagen rocked at restart

TABLE toppers FC Copenhagen suffered a shock 2-0 defeat at OB Odense on the first day back after the winter break, allowing Brondby, 2-1 winners at home to Viborg, to cut their lead to six points.

OB's goals came from winter-break signings Steffen Hojer (ex-Viborg) and Thomas Lindrup, of Brondby, whose midfielder Morten Wieghorst won a recall to the national side for the recent Euro 2004 qualifiers.

Jim Holden

FINLAND

It's official: HJK change the ref

HJK HELSINKI coach Keith Armstrong caused controversy by engineering a change of referee for his side's game against local rivals Jokerit in the Final of a recent indoor tournament.

Armstrong refused to field his side unless the designated referee, Heikki Pajunen of Helsinki, was changed. Armstrong argued that since Pajunen would not referee HJK's games during the League season because of restrictions on same-town officials, the match would not serve the club's purposes.

Incredibly, Armstrong had his way and the match was handled by three outsiders, none of whom was an official referee. "Armstrong's antics were outrageous," fumed Petri Helin, Jokerit's sports chief. "What happens if coaches are allowed to pick their own favourite referees? We only took part in this comedy because of commitments to our sponsors."

Later, Finland's elite referees association threatened to boycott HJK's future games, which finally led to a public apology from Armstrong.

Pentti Hietanen

ICELAND

Chairmen vote clubs into trouble

DO turkeys vote for Christmas? Ask the chairmen of Iceland's senior clubs, who recently voted for a series of measures which puts them all under serious financial pressure and could put some out of business.

The measures, designed to bring the country into line with UEFA regulations and due to be implemented by 2007, require clubs to meet a number of stringent conditions in order to gain a licence to play in the Premier League. Those relating to ground requirements were clearly drawn up in a setting far removed from Icelandic reality.

Each club must provide a stadium with seats for up to 1,500 spectators, the exact figure depending on their average gate, half of them to be covered. Facilities for players and match officials must also be upgraded.

Who will pay for all this? "The local authorities," says the FA, "with some help, of course, from ourselves and UEFA." But of the 10 clubs in the Premier League, only two (IA Akranes and KR Reykjavik) come anywhere near to meeting the proposals. Fram and Throttur lodge at the national stadium, while the rest face huge redevelopment bills for grounds that stand empty eight months of the year.

Rab Christie

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Tide turns for Terim

The Galatasaray coach is enjoying a resurgence, writes Suna Erdem

TURKEY

'TERIM'S BACK' is the new mantra in Turkey. After a dismal first half to the season, when Galatasaray crashed out of a relatively easy Champions League group, lost 6-0 to deadly rivals Fenerbahce and generally looked lacklustre in the domestic League, it seemed to be all over for coach Fatih Terim. But his star is back on the ascendant after the winter break, when he did some serious tactical rethinking and made the sound signings of Abel Xavier from Liverpool and Haim Revivo from Fenerbahce. Gala have barely looked back since kicking off the spring campaign, winning six out of seven League games, including a 2-0 victory over Fenerbahce, to take them to within a point of League leaders Besiktas, though the latter had a game in hand. Terim's side are still not pretty to watch, but at least they win now.

That said, all is still not well within the camp, with reports of the coach having rows with certain players in the dressing-rooms. Another new signing, Ali Lukunku, has failed to make the grade so far, while World Cup star Hasan Sas is out of sorts due to a row over his future at the club.

But Terim will take heart that all is not as it should be at Besiktas. After a stunning 7-3 victory over Goztepe in a match played on their centenary and a number of other high-scoring wins, the Black Eagles seem to have clammed up in an effort to preserve their unbeaten League record. Indeed, coach Mircea Lucescu has been giving lectures about the need to boost their defence. But the resultant loss of fluidity could make it hard for Besiktas to fight off Galatasaray's renewed challenge.

There is hardly likely to be one from Fenerbahce. The club, 15 points behind the leaders by late March, have still not settled despite numerous transfers and a change of coach. After a 3-3 draw with lowly Elazigspor, the club announced they were sidelining several senior players, including captain Ogun Temizkanoglu, as being of no further use.

Right direction...Fatih Terim has transformed Galatasaray's season

Suspension...Christian Karembeu

GREECE

Clock ticking on Athens reconstruction

FIFA has told the Greek authorities there can be no further construction work delays if Athens is to stage any games during next year's Olympics soccer tournament. While the work is between 40 to 60 per cent completed in the other venues for the competition – Thessaloniki, Patras, Volos and Heraklion – construction has yet to begin in the capital.

The finals of both the men's and women's competition are scheduled to take place at Athens' Karaiskaki stadium, where Olympiakos played for many years. But with the necessary reconstruction and refurbishment not due to start until April 7, there is no room for any hitches if it is to be completed in time for the Olympics in August next year.

Olympiakos' French international midfielder Christian Karembeu was suspended for three matches after being sent off for physically attacking two PAOK Salonika players during a February League match. Karembeu, who had pushed his opponents after grabbing them by the neck, apologised for his actions but said he had been provoked by verbal insults.

There was also trouble off the field for Olympiakos, who received a two-match home ban after some of their supporters attacked AEK Athens president Yiannis Granitsas during the 2-1 home derby defeat. Meanwhile, AEK coach Dusan Bayevic shocked reporters when he said he had received death threats from angry AEK fans who consider him a traitor for having previously coached Olympiakos. Bayevic went on to say that he would "kill anyone who harms my family".

Lou Economopoulos

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

Obilic president arrested

SVETLANA RAZNATOVIC, the president of 1998 League champions Obilic, was arrested in March because of her links to the mafia. The move came as part of a huge campaign against organised crime that followed the assassination of Serbia's prime minister, Zoran Djindjic. Raznatovic, a pop star and widow of Serbian warlord Zeljko Raznatovic ('Arkan'), has led Obilic since her husband's assassination in January 2000.

The government declared a state of emergency in the wake of Djindjic's death, with the League programme of the weekend of March 15/16 postponed until April 16. The interior ministry also ordered two games the following week – Sartid v Red Star Belgrade and Cukaricki v runaway leaders Partizan – to be played behind closed doors because of security concerns.

Vladimir Novak

CROATIA

Big Two rivalry reaching a peak

THE pressure to win the League title has never been greater for Croatia's two biggest clubs – Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split – with both suffering financial difficulties.

Dinamo, seven points clear of their rivals after 22 rounds, have traditionally had the advantage of being able to attract sponsorship more readily than Hajduk because Zagreb lies in the richer north of the country. Despite this, the club's executive vice-president, Zdravko Mamic, recently stated that: "We have to be champions, otherwise we will face bankruptcy."

Hajduk, based in the south, are now reliant on their management team, all former internationals, to pump in money. The quartet – Igor Stimac, Aljosa Asanovic, Slaven Bilic and Alen Boksic – have all invested personal money in order to ensure the club's young talented players do not leave. "We have to be champions because our accounts are blocked and we cannot proceed with our business," says Stimac.

Hajduk have also received financial aid of a kind from current international Milan Rapajic, who has agreed to play for his first club virtually for free after quitting Turkish side Fenerbahce and failing to agree terms with Celtic.

Zdravko Reic

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Refs accused of favouring Serbs

ACCUSATIONS have been flying that the League's Serbian referees are favouring leaders Leotar, a Serb team, to ensure they stay top of the table.

The most controversial incident came during Leotar's home game against lowly Kozara, who had kept the game scoreless until the 90th minute, when Serb referee Vladan Matic awarded Leotar a penalty. It was converted to give the side a vital win and stay two points clear of Bosnian team Zeljeznicar.

"That was an example of pure theft," said Kozara coach Branimir Tulic, who had stated before the match that he was wary of Matic, having seen four penalties awarded against Kozara by him in other games. Tulic even took his squad to church to pray for protection from false judgment before the Leotar game. After the match, Zeljeznicar officials also stated their suspicions that Serbian referees are protecting Leotar, suggesting it is because the Premier League referees' chief is also a Serb.

Two more coaches have lost their jobs – Halim Stupac at Jedinstvo and Zoran Jankovic at Rudar Ugljevik – leaving just four of the 20 top-flight clubs to have retained the same coach since the season's start.

Zdravko Reic

Round-up

Korotan expulsion sparks points row

SLOVENIAN side Korotan, recently docked seven points for non-payment of players, have been excluded from the League after failing to show up for two games in March. But while Korotan had been on the verge of pulling out anyway as they were doomed to the drop, the implications of their expulsion have caused consternation for leaders Publikum. The FA has decided Korotan's results from the first third of the season should stand, but that their last eight results should be expunged. Publikum have complained this would adversely affect them since their recent 5-0 win over Korotan would be void.

Zdravko Reic

BELASICA maintained their lead in **MACEDONIA** after the spring restart, boosted by the continued presence of midfielder Robert Popov. He signed for Russian side Shinnik during the winter break but remains at Belasica after the Yaroslavl club did not pay the first instalment of his transfer fee.

Staying on...Robert Popov

Rade Gjorgovski became the second new coach within weeks at crisis club Pelister after Spase Ristevski, replacement for Perica Gruevski, left the post after only three days. Ristevski walked out when it became clear the club had not met their promise to pay players.

Michel Stojmanovski

Sliema Wanderers have emerged as clear favourites to win the **MALTESE** title after a 3-2 win over nearest rivals Birkirkara gave them an eight-point lead in the championship play-off pool.

Domenico Aquilina

Pro-file Daniel Pancu

Romanian revelation at Turkish leaders Besiktas

DANIEL PANCU, one of the driving forces behind Besiktas' long-time lead in the Turkish League this season, has come a long way since his days as an Italian League misfit. The Romanian international forward was so disappointing for Serie B side Cesena during 1999-00 that he was sent back to old club Rapid Bucharest within a year.

During Pancu's original spell at Rapid, his mazy dribbles had earned him the nickname 'Ronaldo of Giulesti' – the Giulesti being Rapid's stadium. Yet his failure to make an impact in Italy meant his pride and career plans had taken a big dent on his return to the Romanian capital.

However, his confidence began to return during his second spell at Rapid, and a dozen goals in the 2000-01 season indicated he was far from a spent force. Last season he was the Romanian League's joint top scorer with 15 goals, scored in Rapid's national Cup Final win over city rivals Dinamo and made his international debut in a World Cup qualifier against Georgia.

"When things were going wrong at Cesena, a place in the Romania squad seemed totally out of reach," admits Pancu. "So I was delighted when I was given my chance with the national team. Unfortunately, we lost in the World Cup play-offs to Slovenia, but I'm convinced we will be back to our best at Euro 2004."

With his sporting reputation restored and unhappy that Rapid were reneging on promised bonuses, Pancu again thought about joining a foreign club. A transfer to China was mooted last summer, but instead his agent, the ubiquitous Giovanni Becali, negotiated a deal for him to go on loan to Besiktas, where he would be reunited with his former boss at Rapid, Mircea Lucescu. How well the move has worked out. Pancu has proved a revelation playing in a withdrawn role just behind the strikers, making life uncomfortable for defenders with his cute movement, expressive ball skills and potent right-footed shooting.

Ironically, his success with the Black Eagles has aroused interest from a number of sides in Italy, where he proved such a flop before. However, they will have to get past Besiktas first. The Istanbul side recently ripped up their loan deal with Pancu, signing him on a three-year contract. "This is very good news for me," said the Romanian. "The fans here are wonderful, I have the greatest respect for Mircea Lucescu, and Besiktas have proved in the Turkish championship and the UEFA Cup this season that we are extremely competitive. There's much more to come from us."

Nick Bidwell

Fact file

Club Besiktas (Tur)
Country Romania
Born August 17, 1977, in Iasi
Previous clubs Politehnica Timisoara, Rapid Bucharest, Cesena (Ita), Rapid Bucharest
International debut October 2001, v Georgia
International caps 10 (2 goals)
Honours Romanian Cup 1998, 2002

Lokomotiv sneak Supercup

Victor Gusev on a victory for the champions in the new season-opening game

RUSSIA

CHAMPIONS Lokomotiv Moscow beat Cup holders CSKA Moscow on penalties after a 1-1 draw to become the first Russian Supercup winners. The match, which paired the same sides who contested the specially-staged championship play-off last season, is to become the regular season-opening game.

CSKA's record signing Jiri Jarosik put his side in front after 39 minutes, and Lokomotiv had to wait until seven minutes from time for an equaliser when substitute Ruslan Pimenov scored in a goalmouth scramble. After a goalless extra-time, rival captains Dmitri Loskov and Rolan Gusev both failed to score during the penalty shoot-out, but Lokomotiv keeper Sergei Ovchinnikov ensured the trophy came to his team by making four superb saves.

We're first...Lokomotiv get their hands on the inaugural Supercup

Three clubs started the new season under new names. Alaniya Vladikavkaz regained their old name of Spartak-Alaniya, under which they won the national title in 1995; Rostov Rostselmash, lengthy and clumsy even by local standards, became simply Rostov; and Torpedo-ZIL, who emerged in 1997 when Torpedo Moscow split in two, are now called Torpedo-Metallurg in recognition of their new owners, an industrial plant in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. The club are still based in Moscow, however, despite persistent rumours that they are moving to Siberia.

Long-serving Valeri Karpin finally said goodbye to the national team, informing manager Valeri Gazzayev that he wanted to concentrate on his club career. The 34-year-old midfielder has been in great form with Spanish League high-fliers Real Sociedad.

Andrei Tikhonov, a former Moscow Spartak team-mate of Karpin, has become only the second player to score 100 goals in the Russian (post-Soviet Union) League. The 32-year-old, now at Kryliya Sovetov, follows in the footsteps of Rotor's Oleg Veretennikov (178) into the 100 Club. Tikhonov, a former Spartak icon, left the club three years ago following a spat with manager Oleg Romantsev.

Abusive...Karel Poborsky

CZECH REPUBLIC

Big Two denied by dodgy decisions

THE country's involvement in European club competition ended with Slavia's controversial defeat by Besiktas in the UEFA Cup fourth round. Slavia were denied a stoppage-time winner when Tomas Hrdlicka's long-range free-kick was ruled out for offside by Italian referee Domenico Messina.

Controversial refereeing has also been a feature of the domestic League. A TV audience and the season's biggest crowd – 17,263 – saw the bad side of Banik Ostrava's Vaclav Sverkos when the young striker appeared to dive to win a penalty during his team's 3-2 win over Sparta.

After the game, incensed Sparta captain Karel Poborsky refused to speak to the media and was later fined by the FA for verbally abusing reporters.

The title race is developing into a straight fight between Prague's big two. Sparta ended a run of shaky performances by thrashing champions Slovan Liberec 5-0 on March 8, while Slavia, trailing Sparta by two points, beat third-placed Teplice 3-1 a week later to open up an eight-point gap over the chasing pack.

Banik midfielder Martin Lukes has been demoted to their B team, who play in the regional Third Division, until the end of the season following a bitter dispute with the club over a new contract. Fans protested about Banik owner Daniel Vacek's handling of the affair by hurling tennis balls on to the pitch before the League game against Ceske Budejovice – Vacek is a former tennis star.

Sam Beckwith

UKRAINE

Shakhtar shocked by Balabanov

TWO goals from Under-21 striker Konstantin Balabanov gave bottom side Chornomorets a shock 2-0 home victory over leaders Shakhtar Donetsk in late March to open up the championship race and give the Odessa side renewed hope of top-flight survival.

Shakhtar's defeat ended their 10-game winning run and the score would have been worse had Dmytro Shutkov not saved a penalty.

Shakhtar's closest rivals, Kyiv Dynamo, closed the gap to four points by beating Illichivets (formerly known as Metalurh Mariupol) 1-0 away on the same weekend. Chornomorets' victory took them off the bottom on goal difference, with 14 points from 18 games, the same as new table-proppers Vorskla and Metalurh Zaporizhzhya.

Michael Bowesfield

POLAND

Wisla stutter at the top

WISLA KRAKOW'S Champions League ambitions were dealt a blow when they were held to a 1-1 draw at home by lowly Garbarnia Szczakowianka in the second round of the spring campaign. The result allowed Katowice, 2-0 winners at home to Wisla Plock, to cut Wisla Krakow's lead to just two points.

Defending champions Legia Warsaw appear to be in decline having sold two influential players – Bulgarian goalkeeper Radostin Stanev to Russia's Shinnik Yaroslavl and Belorussian defender Sergei Omelyanchuk to Arsenal Kyiv of Ukraine – during the winter break. A 2-0 home defeat by Groclin Dyskobolia left them four points behind Wisla Krakow.

Bottom side Pogon Szczecin are carrying on after fears they would have to withdraw from the League because of huge debts. Chairman Les Gondor has offered the players a combined bonus of £150,000 if they avoid relegation, but there is little danger that he will have to produce the money – Pogon took just six points from their first 17 games.

KSZO Ostrowiec, another of the relegation candidates, suspended 14 of their squad after they claimed sick leave a week before the first game of the spring campaign. The mass absence was, in fact, in protest about non-payment of wages. Four players made a miraculous recovery in time to face Garbarnia, but KSZO lost that game and the next, at home to Lech Poznan, to go second bottom.

An attempt by a consortium of investors to build a 'dream team' at Second Division Piotrcovia Trybunalski has imploded. After insisting the team "must be promoted at the end of this season", the group recruited coach Franciszek Smuda, who led Widzew Lodz to two titles in the 1990s, and five ex-internationals.

Farewell, Levski...Slavoljub Muslin

However, Piotrcovia lost 4-0 to Arka Gdynia in their first match of the spring and Smuda was sacked.

Dariusz Kurowski

BULGARIA

Club president assassinated

ILIA PAVLOV, president of Varna-based Cherno More, was shot dead outside his office in Sofia in early March. The motive and assailants are unknown.

Pavlov was majority shareholder of the company that owns Cherno More, taking a controlling interest in the club in summer 2001. He was previously chairman of CSKA Sofia.

Serb coach Slavoljub Muslin has left Levski Sofia by mutual consent after the 2-1 home defeat by city rivals Slavia on March 8 which left the club six points behind leaders and arch-rivals CSKA. Muslin led Levski to the League and Cup double last season, but discontent grew this term with failure to reach the Champions League group stage, exit from the UEFA Cup and a 3-0 League defeat by CSKA.

Michael Bowesfield

Round-up

Dinamo ditch Dinu

DINAMO BUCHAREST coach Cornel Dinu was fired after his side's third straight **ROMANIAN** League defeat left them 12 points behind leaders and city rivals Rapid. He was replaced by former Dinamo player and Romanian international Ioan Andone, who left Sportul Studentesc to take up the post.

Dinu's departure came after Dinamo's 3-2 defeat at Ceahlaul Piatra Neamt, who had appointed Viorel Hizo as coach only the week before. Hizo, who replaced Gheorghe Poenaru, is in his second spell at Ceahlaul, having left in 2001 after a row over a substitution during an InterToto Cup game.

Former Dinamo midfielder Cezar Dinu has died following a car crash in February. Dinu, 27, had been on loan at Second Division Unirea 2002 Focsani from top-flight Astra Ploesti.

Michael Bowesfield

Clear **SLOVAKIAN** League leaders Slovan Bratislava made a terrible start to the spring campaign, losing two of their first four games. But the damage was softened by the poor results of their challengers. Spartak Trnava, second at the winter break, nine points behind, lost three out of four; third-placed MSK Zilina dropped points when only drawing at home to Puchov and away to lowly Dubnica.

Artmedia Petrzalka were the side to benefit, moving up to third place after inflicting one of Slovan's defeats, 2-0 at home in mid-March.

Ed Holt

MTK, with new Brazilian signing Silva already among the goals, have emerged as favourites to take the **HUNGARIAN** League title. However, closest challengers Ferencvaros bounced back from a 2-0 defeat at Debrecen to hammer Gyor 5-2 and stay within a point of the leaders.

Fans of Second Division Vasas have threatened to take the club to court following some shocking displays this season. The basis for any action would be that the players aren't footballers at all!

In another sign of despondency, wreaths were laid at the six-times champions' modest ground in the working-class Angyalfold district of Budapest.

Peterjon Cresswell

Pro-file Alexander Hleb

Belorussian earning his Bundesliga spurs at Stuttgart

IT'S NOT all doom and gloom for the Belarus national team, despite having lost their first three Euro 2004 qualifiers. With the likes of Stuttgart attacking midfielder Alexander Hleb starting to blossom, the belief in the ex-USSR republic is one of far brighter tomorrows.

There has not been a better crop of Belarus talent since a home-grown Dinamo Minsk side captured the Soviet League title in 1982. The country can now call on forwards Vitaliy Kutuzov (on loan at Sporting Lisbon from Milan) and Vitaliy Bulyga (Russian side Kryliya Sovetov), and keeper Yuri Tsygalko (Torpedo Moscow). But 21-year-old Hleb is surely the leader of the pack.

He has his faults – his heading and finishing both need to improve. However, he boasts the ability to play either through the middle or out wide, a blinding change of pace, vision and poise on the ball, and graceful dribbling skills. Not for nothing is he one of the most fouled players in the Bundesliga. "It's not a problem," smiles Hleb. "Football isn't ballet."

Hleb has been one of the principal boys of a youthful Stuttgart side that has gone from strength to strength this season, and was a worthy Belarus Sportsman of the Year for 2002.

The youngster caught the eye of club side BATE Borisov during his time at the Minsk Sport Academy, was a first-team player at 17 and played a starring role as BATE cruised to the 1999 League title.

The former gymnast won interest from a number of Bundesliga sides, with 1860 Munich the first to invite him over. But Hleb was not impressed by their offhand reception and moved on for a trial at Stuttgart. There, the welcome was much warmer, not least because he was able to converse in Russian with Bulgarian playmaker Krassimir Balakov, who took on the role of big brother. Following a fine display in a friendly against Ajax, he signed in January 2000.

After making only a handful of appearances during his first 18 months at the club, Hleb's breakthrough came early last season. He created three of Stuttgart's goals as part of a midfield masterclass in the 4-2 win at Nurnberg, and from then on was a regular starter.

"I have been surprised at how decisive he has been," says coach Felix Magath. "He can start the sort of moves defenders just don't expect. Tactically, he needs more work, but it will come with experience."

Stuttgart need not worry about the playmaker role when Balakov retires at the end of this season. In Alexander Hleb they have a ready-made replacement.

Nick Bidwell

Fact file

Club **Stuttgart (Ger)**
Country **Belarus**
Born **May 1, 1981, in Minsk**
Previous club **BATE Borisov**
International debut **October 2001, v Wales**
International caps **8 (2 goals)**
Honours **Belorussian League 1999**

No justice...Julio Baptista of Sao Paulo fends off Santos' Leo in last season's championship quarter-final

May the best team win

Brian Homewood believes the restructured national championship should produce a fairer contest

BRAZIL

BRAZILIAN football is about to embark on a journey into the unknown. For the first time in its 32-year history, the national championship will test a format that already has some of its directors, plus the television networks, quivering with apprehension.

It can never work, they say, and will lead the game down the road to financial ruin. The prophets of doom foresee the contest finishing before it even starts, fans losing interest and clubs going to the wall.

Amid general incredulity, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) has come up with the following system for the 2003 championship: the 24 teams will play each other twice over a nine-month period and, at the end of this, the team that has the most points will be champions. It is a concept that many Brazilian directors – and some of the media – are still struggling to grasp. Although the Brazilian championship has used an amazing variety of weird and wonderful formats and never kept the same one for two years running, the one thing that it has always had is a Final. Brazilian fans, the directors claim, need a Final.

Last year, supporters, in addition to the national championship Final, had the state championship Finals and quite a few others as well. What they did not have was a straightforward league in which the best team wins.

Fortunately, the more enlightened sections of the media began realising this many years ago and have pointed out some of the injustices committed by the Brazilian systems. Last year, for example, Sao Paulo ran away with the qualifying stage – in which the 24 teams played each other once – only to be beaten in the quarter-finals by Santos, who had finished eighth, a full 13 points behind them.

The expansion of the Brazilian championship means the state championships have been forced to shrink, for which we can only be hugely grateful, especially as both the Paulista and Carioca championships ended in the usual chaos.

The Paulista turned into a farce after the federation claimed the rules had been "badly written" and changed them in between the two legs of the Sao Paulo-Corinthians Final.

Initially, the rules were that, if the Final ended in an aggregate draw, the winners would be decided on the number of red and yellow cards received during the competition – which benefited Corinthians. But, after Corinthians had won the first leg 3-2, the federation changed the criteria to the team with the best overall goal difference – which was Sao Paulo.

Corinthians appealed, and, on the eve of the second leg, Brazil's top sporting tribunal ruled that it could not decide on the matter at such short notice and the match would have to go ahead without a tiebreak at all. That meant that if Sao Paulo won by a single goal, the Final would be decided later in the boardrooms. Corinthians averted this possibility by winning the second leg 3-2 but, at one stage, it was in the balance as Sao Paulo drew level after being 2-0 down at half-time.

It was a typically nervous encounter, especially following a week of mutual provocation between the teams in the media. Within three minutes a brawl erupted, resulting in Reinaldo of Sao Paulo and Kleber of Corinthians being sent off. Sao Paulo's Fabio Simplicio was also dismissed.

The Carioca was a more straightforward affair involving 10 teams, with the top four going into the semi-finals and the team finishing top of the first stage receiving the Guanabara Cup as a sort of bonus. But even here the directors contrived to make a hash of things, declaring Vasco da Gama as Guanabara winners – and actually presenting them with the trophy – before they had mathematically made sure of finishing top.

The real fun and games, however, came in the second leg of the Vasco-Fluminense Final. This produced 78 fouls, two red cards and a brawl instigated by Vasco manager Antonio Lopes, who threw the ball at an injured Fluminense player.

Lopes, wearing his 'lucky' outfit of a yellow shirt meaning 'success' and white trousers meaning 'peace', then lashed out at his opposite number, Renato Portaluppi. At this, practically everyone on the pitch – which at the Maracana includes a legion of hangers-on, plus dozens of radio reporters – joined in, holding up play for 10 minutes.

Lopes, who has suffered a succession of failed hair implants in the past couple of years, was sent off, refused to go and the game restarted anyway. He was eventually persuaded to watch the second half from a radio commentary box, handing over the command to the Vasco assistant coach – his son Antonio Lopes Junior.

Referee Samir Yarak, who had just sent off Marcelinho Carioca (Vasco da Gama) and Marcinho (Fluminense), then contrived to complete the game without showing any more red cards despite some truly horrendous tackling. And, to cap it all, after all the punching, kicking, elbowing and arguing, Vasco duly completed a lap of honour carrying a banner emblazoned with the words "Jesus, this victory is yours." Stomach-churning stuff.

Brazilian Championship Preview

THE FAVOURITES

CORINTHIANS
Beaten finalists last year but have lost coach Carlos Alberto Parreira (now in charge of the national team), who made the most of a limited squad. Nevertheless, they have made an excellent start to the Libertadores Cup under his replacement, Geninho, and won the Paulista Final. New striker Liedson is a vast improvement on the lumbering Guillerme, his young striking partner Gil also appears destined for great things, and midfielder Jorge Wagner, former captain of Cruzeiro, has so far proved an inspired buy.

CRUZEIRO
Led by former Brazil coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo, Cruzeiro have had an excellent start to the year and threaten to launch a credible title challenge. Main new signings are striker Deivid from Corinthians, former Colombian international Victor Hugo Aristizabal and the previously unknown Mota, who has been a prolific scorer since arriving from Ceara.

SANTOS
Getting to the top is one thing, staying there is another. The defending champions, who delighted with their football last year as they came from nowhere to win the title, are no longer a surprise element. They also have the Libertadores Cup to distract their attention. But, having so far held on to teenagers Robinho and Diego, and strengthened the team with striker Ricardo Oliveira, they still have bags of talent.

SAO PAULO
The club's directors claim they have the best squad, which neatly puts the onus for success on the shoulders of coach Oswaldo Oliveira, who has to fight to keep his job after every defeat and/or bad performance. When midfielders Kaka and Ricardinho (both reserves at the World Cup last year) and volatile striker Luis Fabiano are on song, they are indeed a force to be reckoned with, but have been known to bottle it when the going gets tough.

THE OTHERS

ATLETICO MINEIRO
Belo Horizonte's most popular club won the first national championship in 1971 but not since. They start this time under Celso Roth, from the 60-foul-a-match school of coaching. Signings include defender Scheidt on loan from Celtic.

ATLETICO PARANAENSE
Surprise champions in 2001, but have been busy offloading players since. Most recent departures were strikers Alex Mineiro and Kleber, to Mexico's Tigres. One of the few to have stayed is World Cup midfielder Kleberson, who wants to leave but can't find anyone willing to pay the reported £13million asking price.

No sale...Kleberson

BAHIA
After just avoiding relegation last year, Salvador's biggest club have offloaded 17 players and imposed a salary cap of £6,000 a month. The 1988 champions did not do well in the local state championship and have already sacked one coach this year, Candinho.

CORITIBA
Coach Paulo Bonamigo has completed a year at the club and, with a young team, hopes to improve on last season's 11th place.

CRICIUMA
Back in the First Division for the first time since 1997, they have largely kept last year's promotion-winning side, including coach Abel Ribeiro. Last major trophy was the Copa Brasil in 1991, under ex-Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari.

FIGUEIRENSE
Florianopolis-based side who produced their best performance last year when finishing 17th but have lost several key players since, plus coach Muricy Ramalho.

FLAMENGO
Ruinous administration, culminating in president Edmundo Santos Silva being kicked out for alleged misuse of funds, has turned Brazil's most popular club into perennial relegation fighters. Their top-flight stay may be in danger again, especially with Athirson due to return to Juventus after his loan runs out in June.

FLUMINENSE
Surpassed expectations by reaching the semi-finals last year. This term, much could depend on whether Romario returns from his spell in Qatar with Al Sadd. But 18-year-old midfielder Carlos Alberto is a highly promising youngster.

FORTALEZA
Back in the top flight after 10 years, led by diminutive striker Clodoaldo, who has one of the best scoring records in Brazil. Won all 14 Second Division home games last term.

GOIAS
Strictly mid-table. Most important signing is striker Dimba, who scored 17 goals in last year's championship despite playing for relegated Gama.

GREMIO
Champions in 1981 and 1996, and traditionally one of Brazil's most physical sides. The team includes a number of seasoned pros including striker Rodrigo Fabri – competition top scorer last year with 19 goals – captain Roger – in the 1995 Libertadores Cup-winning team – striker Christian and free-kick specialist Anderson Lima. Beaten semi-finalists last year, but internal strife may limit their chances this term.

GUARANI
Champions in 1978 and runners-up twice during the 1980s, the club that produced Careca have fallen on hard times recently. Likely to be struggling against the drop.

INTERNACIONAL
Champions three times in six years during the 1970s, but have since turned into a mid-table outfit. Heavily dependent on youngsters.

Set-piece king...Anderson Lima

JUVENTUDE
Caxias do Sul-based side produced their best performance last year when finishing seventh under ex-Brazil defender Ricardo Gomes, now in charge of the Olympic team. He was replaced by assistant Cristovao in a rare Brazilian case of continuity. Rather more typically, most of last year's squad have left; it remains to be seen whether the newcomers are up to scratch.

PARANA
Only founded in 1989. They escaped the drop by the skin of their teeth last year and failed to reinforce since. Another relegation fight looms.

PAYSANDU
Belem-based side who won the Brazilian Champions Cup last year, qualifying for the Libertadores, but finished only 20th in the national championship. Not too many changes since last year but striker Robson, signed from Bahia, is proving a useful buy. Home form, backed by fervent support, could prove decisive.

PONTE PRETA
Guarani's arch-rivals from the city of Campinas have performed respectably in the four years since returning to the top flight, but a severe financial crisis has led to a player exodus this year. A dismal performance in the Paulista points to difficult times ahead.

SAO CAETANO
Since taking advantage of the bizarre ruling allowing the top three Second Division teams into the final stages of the Brazilian championship three years ago, this modest team from the industrial outskirts of Sao Paulo have never looked back. Runners-up in 2000 and 2001, quarter-finalists last year, and they even reached the Libertadores Final. Still have the core of the team and must be taken seriously – perhaps literally, as coach Mario Sergio is famous for having no sense of humour.

VASCO DA GAMA
As victory in the Carioca Final proves, they are probably the strongest Rio team. Coached by ex-police detective Antonio Lopes, Vasco have repatriated bible-bashing free-kick specialist Marcelinho Carioca from Japan and signed sometime-Brazil striker Marques from Atletico Mineiro.

VITORIA
One of the big two from Salvador, but have lost key players from last season, when they just missed out on the quarter-finals. More than ever depending on striker Allan Delon (named after the French actor) for inspiration. Delon survived a shooting during an attempted armed robbery earlier this year.

Inspirational...Allan Delon

Ardiles loses it after wins

Eric Weil on some unwanted attention for the Racing Club coach

ARGENTINA

Red mist...Ardiles was sent off after complaining about the refereeing

RACING CLUB coach Osvaldo Ardiles has been the centre of attention ever since the closing championship kicked off in February. The former international midfielder no doubt enjoyed the limelight as he led his side to the top of the table after they won their first three games. But he was then sent off during his team's clash with fellow high-fliers Rosario Central in mid-March following his vehement complaints about the quality of the refereeing. The flashpoint came when Fabian Madorran controversially awarded a penalty to Rosario when there had been no apparent infringement by a Racing player.

In fact, the penalty was saved and the game ended 2-2. But Ardiles was still fuming after the game. "His refereeing was absolutely lamentable," he stormed, no doubt also frustrated that the draw had allowed Boca Juniors, 2-1 winners at San Lorenzo on the same day, to leapfrog both sides to take pole position.

Ardiles can take some solace from the fact that the Racing fans are finally taking to him. The 1978 World Cup winner had a hard act to follow when taking over from Racing's championship-winning coach Reinaldo Merlo just before the current season began. Now the supporters chant: "Merlo led us to the League title; Ardiles will take us to Japan [for the World Club Cup]." Racing were certainly on course for the Libertadores Cup that would earn them that trip, topping their first-round group at the halfway stage.

Racing fans will also be relishing the plight of local rivals Independiente, who won the opening championship but took just two points from their first six games of the closing campaign. The Avellaneda side appear to be paying the price for an over-tiring pre-season – when they travelled long distances to play eight warm-up games – since the squad is virtually identical to the one that triumphed in the opening campaign.

Financial constraints are forcing several top clubs to rely more and more on players from their junior sections. Rosario, who have 13 juniors now in their senior squad, and fifth-placed Velez Sarsfield, with 14, are clearly doing well on it, at least for the time being. The same cannot be said for Huracan, whose crop of 12 juniors have failed to produce results. The team took just one point from their first five games, leading to the departure of coach Carlos Babington. His replacement is Jorge Celico, who needs to be a miracle worker to lift Huracan out of the relegation placings.

In another coaching change, experienced Uruguayan Luis Cubilla has just taken the reins from Sergio Batista at Talleres Cordoba. Cubilla inherits a squad containing 37-year-old keeper Luis Islas, who is bucking the trend for youth by giving some outstanding performances in his 20th First Division season as he attempts to keep Talleres away from the drop zone.

Round-up

BOLIVIA: Former international keeper Carlos Trucco lasted only two weeks as national team coach, walking out on the job when offered better terms by Mexican club Pachuca. During his brief time in charge, Trucco had complained that leading Bolivian clubs had been reluctant to release players for international duty.

CHILE: Former Colombian international striker Faustino Asprilla has been making waves at his new club, Universidad de Chile, playing well and scoring goals but then getting himself sent off in the big Santiago derby against Colo Colo. Asprilla was shown the red card just before half-time in the 0-0 draw after retaliating over repeated fouling. Colo Colo, who also finished with 10 men, had US keeper Johnny Walker to thank for securing them a point.

COLOMBIA: Newly-promoted Centauros made an impressive start to their top-flight campaign, going unbeaten for the first six matches. However, their success has led to frustration among fans, who are unable to get tickets for home games. Serious fighting broke out between supporters and police after hundreds of fans were locked out of the club's 10,000-capacity stadium for a recent game against Millonarios.

Centauros' unbeaten run was ended by an emphatic 3-0 defeat at the hands of Once Caldas, who led the table by a point from defending champions America after eight rounds.

ECUADOR: The referees' strike over pay, which delayed the start of the opening championship by a week, has finally been settled. The officials have received a salary increase of 30 per cent. El Nacional were the only team to win all of their first three games.

PARAGUAY: Last year's champions Libertad carried on where they left off by winning their first four games of this season's opening championship.

Tino in trouble...Asprilla

PERU: Alianza Lima beat Universitario 1-0 in the classic Lima derby and then went on to win their next game to take a three-point lead in the early opening championship table. Universitario, who won last year's opening title but then had to let most of their leading players go due to financial problems, were bottom with just one point after three rounds.

Deportivo Wanka have been punished by the FA over their failure to present accounts showing they have paid wages due to players. Their unplayed opening League game was awarded to Alianza Lima 2-0.

VENEZUELA: Nacional of Tachira have withdrawn from the closing championship because of financial difficulties.

Eric Weil

Eye-catching...Santos (white) v America

LIBERTADORES CUP

Santos the main draw

PELE'S Santos were the leading attractions when the Libertadores Cup first got off the ground. So, 40 years after their last title, the return of Santos to the competition generated massive interest all over South America – both for romantic reasons and because the continent wanted to confirm reports about wonderkids Diego and Robinho.

The team's opening game outdid all expectations. Santos won 5-1 away to Colombia's America, who went through last year's campaign without conceding a goal at home.

Attacking with individual brilliance and collective organisation, Santos have kept on scoring great goals. But they take risks. The midfield press forward, leaving their cumbersome centre-backs exposed, while keeper Fabio Costa is prone to make mad rushes off his line.

Corinthians are also looking strong, with strikers Liedson and Gil especially dangerous. And with newcomers Paysandu the first club to qualify for the second round and Gremio typically workmanlike, there is a good chance a Brazilian side will win the title for the first time this decade.

Defending champions Olimpia of Paraguay offer proof that retaining a title is harder than winning it. A lack of firepower is jeopardising their chances of qualification, and the disappointing results so far forced the resignation of coach Nery Pumpido.

Argentina's River Plate are also struggling, and while Carlos Bianchi has rivals Boca well organised, they look a shadow of the title-winning outfit of 2000 and 2001. Ossie Ardiles' Racing Club are making good progress in their centenary year, though in a relatively easy group.

Tiny Fenix of Uruguay have unearthed a tricky striker in German Hornos, and he was on the scoresheet as his side caused the biggest shock so far with their 6-1 rout of Mexicans Cruz Azul, runners-up two years ago.

Colombia's Deportivo Cali have been the early revelations. They defend deep and spring forward with pace and width, creating plenty of space for playmaker Geovanny Hernandez. A defensive weakness in the air could be their biggest problem.

Tim Vickery

MEXICO

Cruz Azul endure crisis

CRUZ AZUL, traditionally one of the best-run clubs in Latin America, have endured a period of crisis, with a revolt by players leading to the resignation of their coach. Mario Carrillo had been brought in as a replacement for Jose Luis Trejo after Cruz Azul's quarter-final exit in the opening championship was deemed unsatisfactory. However, his disciplinarian style did not go down well with some of the players, who ganged up to undermine his authority. Not surprisingly, the team took only six points from their first nine games of the closing tournament, and Carrillo resigned.

After an investigation, the club decided to terminate the contracts of 10 players, including the apparent leaders of the rebellion, Francisco Palencia and Uruguayan Sebastian Abreu. Deals were then renegotiated with those who wanted to stay, linking salary to a system based upon points won. All the players, including Palencia, signed, except the club's four foreigners. Former national coach Enrique Meza has been appointed as Carrillo's successor.

The national team beat Bolivia 2-0 in a Dallas friendly in mid-March with a performance that suggested coach Ricardo Lavolpe has got the team on the right track following disappointing recent games against Argentina and Colombia.

Carlos Ramirez

Pro-file Marcos

Hallowed World Cup-winning keeper taking the plunge with Palmeiras

LAST year's World Cup was Ronaldo's tournament. But it might not have been. The calm athleticism of Brazil keeper Marcos rescued the side on a number of occasions, including a flying leap to push Oliver Neuville's free-kick on to a post when the Final against Germany was still scoreless.

But keepers learn to prepare for the worst. So Marcos showed little surprise when within a few months of Korea/Japan his club, Palmeiras, were relegated and his international place came under threat. "After five games I predicted that Palmeiras would go down," he says. "The club was a mess. Many players didn't even care about being relegated."

The lack of team spirit came as a shock after being part of coach Luiz Felipe Scolari's World Cup 'family'. And the passing of the Scolari era has serious consequences for Marcos' international future. The keeper won the coach's trust when the pair worked together at Palmeiras, and all but the first of his caps came during Big Phil's reign.

Now, though, the development of specialist preparation has done wonders for the standard of Brazilian goalkeeping, and there are plenty of candidates for the No 1 jersey. "Every coach has his favourite keeper," says Marcos. "I was Scolari's choice but now it seems that [new boss Carlos Alberto] Parreira has a preference for Dida, so I'll have to fight for a place."

Dida, of Milan, and Marcos have been locked in competition for a decade. Goalkeeping coach Valdir de Moraes has worked with them both. "Dida is better at spreading calm through the defence," he says, "while Marcos shows more agility." That quality was in evidence during Palmeiras' recent Libertadores Cup campaigns. Between 1999 and 2001 they were involved in eight shoot-outs, and won six; their keeper earned the nickname 'Saint Marcos' as he plunged right and left to perform his miracles. But all the athleticism in the world was not enough to save the 2002 Palmeiras side from the drop. And there is no guarantee Marcos will stay for long enough to take them back up.

The keeper nearly joined Arsenal in January, only family reasons preventing the move. But the episode whetted his appetite for a move to Europe. However, Marcos is a rustic soul and it might be hard for him to adjust to living in a different country, or organising the defence in a new language. Palmeiras fans can still hope there will be no need to say goodbye to the keeper with the halo.

Tim Vickery

Fact file

Club Palmeiras
Country Brazil
Born July 3, 1973, in Oriente, Sao Paulo
International debut November 1999, v Spain
International caps 24
Honours World Cup 2002; Libertadores Cup 1999; Mercosur Cup 1998; Copa Brasil 1998; Sao Paulo state championship 1996

Home from Europe...Frankie Hejduk

Glamour-free zone

Paul Gardner previews the new MLS season

PROBABLY the most important thing to be said about Major League Soccer is also one of the most obvious: after seven seasons it is still around.

Faint praise? Not really, for the obstacles have been formidable. The history of pro soccer leagues in the USA – all of them, over a period of some 90 years, have died the death – is a clear indication that mere survival is quite an achievement.

Survival is one thing. Strength is quite another. MLS is still a precarious venture, trying to keep a balance between what everyone (including MLS itself) would like it to do – spend heavily on glamorous players – and what limited fiscal resources permit. Inevitably, that satisfies no one. But the triumph, not too strong a word, of continued existence offers hope to everyone.

Commissioner Don Garber stated half a dozen times in his most recent 'state of the League' report that he was "excited" and "thrilled" by various League activities. The hype is understandable, but the reality is that MLS is, at the moment, not too strong on thrills and excitement. Two of the things Garber found exciting were a sponsor renewal and a new radio contract. Important yes, vital even, but hardly thrilling.

> 'The appropriate word to describe MLS is modest...the time is arriving when more sparkle is needed'

Financial caution rules, and it exacts its own price – because it numbs the flamboyance and the showbiz gestures that modern pro sports thrive on. It is not encouraging to realise the League's most important player signing for the upcoming season is French hatchet-man Gilles Grimandi, formerly at Arsenal. And it takes a severe twisting of events to portray the arrival of Joe-Max Moore (ex-Everton) and Frankie Hejduk (Bayer Leverkusen) – both no longer wanted in Europe – as a major event.

The truth is, MLS cannot afford to be glamorous. But to its credit, it does interest itself in more mundane areas vital to long-term success. Garber touched on several of these:

- A need for soccer-specific stadiums. One is already in use by Columbus Crew, another is to open this year for Los Angeles Galaxy, and there are plans for two more for MetroStars and Dallas Burn.

- The importance of player development. Garber talked of a plan for the development of reserve squads for each MLS team, and made pointed reference to the "need to provide opportunities for the enormous number of Hispanic kids who are outside the reach of the current player development system".

- Expansion. MLS has 10 teams – decidedly small in contrast to other pro sports (basketball, baseball, ice hockey and gridiron football all have at least 30). Drumming up new owners and investors was supposed to be a Garber strength. But in his three years at the helm, the League has shrunk from 12 to 10 clubs, two major investors have pulled out, and no new ones have been found.

On the matter of ownership, one investor, Phil Anschutz, now controls six MLS teams. It means that the League is very much at the mercy of one man – a precarious state of affairs Garber did not mention.

One obstacle to continued MLS growth – incredibly, it came from the soccer community itself! – has been overcome. The multi-million dollar lawsuit launched against the League in 1997 by the MLS Players' Association collapsed when the Supreme Court refused to hear the players' appeal against an earlier adverse verdict.

The appropriate word to describe MLS and its activities is 'modest'. It is making no extravagant claims, launching no grandiose schemes, signing no superstars. The approach is sensible and has worked reasonably well for seven years. But the time is arriving when more sparkle is needed, when the negative effects of being rather dull will outweigh the positive effects of not losing too much money. Successful pro sports, surely, need a sizeable dose of glamour.

MLS Team-by-team preview

Potent mix...Chicago Fire (red) and San Jose Earthquakes clash

CHICAGO FIRE

All change. Coach Bob Bradley has departed for MetroStars, and his replacement, Dave Sarachan (formerly assistant to national team coach Bruce Arena), was forced, by the League's salary cap rules, to transfer key players Josh Wolff and Dema Kovalenko. Hristo Stoichkov has moved to DC United, while captain Peter Nowak has retired. Only one experienced player has arrived – forward Rodrigo Faria from MetroStars. Veteran midfielder Chris Armas is back from knee surgery, but the accent will be on youth, led by DaMarcus Beasley (21), Craig Capano (18) and Justin Mapp (18). Fire will continue playing at the tiny, unsuitable stadium of North Central College in Naperville, 25 miles from Chicago.

- Title potential slim – too many changes, not enough experience.

COLORADO RAPIDS

General manager Dan Counce announced last season Rapids were changing colours to black and blue – to send an intimidating message to opponents. The threat has been made flesh and blood by the signing of Gilles Grimandi. Pre-season games revealed considerable scoring talent from 22-year-old rookie Casey Schmidt, straight out of Boston College. In midfield, alongside combative Grimandi, coach Tim Hankinson can rely on the growing maturity of Pablo Mastroeni, MLS's most versatile player, and skills of Mark Chung.

- Midfield and attack look good, but defence – where experience, not to mention talent, is in short supply – highly questionable.

COLUMBUS CREW

Coach Greg Andrulis, in his first full season in charge last year, engineered a quiet move away from a hard-running, straightforward approach. "America's Hardest Working Team" was the club's motto, exemplified by now-departed veteran John Harkes. The emphasis now is on a more skilful and attacking style. The acquisition of Guatemalan Freddy Garcia livened things up, as did the emergence of Rookie of the Year Kyle Martino. Brian McBride returns from his Everton loan stint, while Frankie Hejduk (also back from Europe) adds speed and attacking flair to the defence. Andrulis did well to pick up Diego Walsh, the most highly-touted of this year's college players.

- Title challenge is on if Crew can overcome seven-year tendency to underperform in big games.

DALLAS BURN

After seven years complaining about their home ground – the ancient, huge, but full-of-character Cotton Bowl – Burn have moved to a small high school stadium in nearby Southlake. Hardly a major league atmosphere. Last year's top signing, ex-Arsenal Irishman Steve Morrow, quickly proved one of the League's slower defenders, but he scored some crucial goals. No major signings this year, but defender Chris Gbandi, out all last season, has now recovered. Ronnie O'Brien (another Irish import) proved a lively addition, but coach Mike Jeffries, to his cost, preferred him to the smaller but much more subtle Joselito Vaca for the play-offs.

- Talent there for serious run at title.

DC UNITED

Coach Ray Hudson got the job when predecessor Thomas Rongen failed to take DC to the 2001 play-offs. Hudson did no better last year but survived. Off-season involved recruiting trips to Argentina and Italy, but the only signing was Bulgarian Galin Ivanov – the "hairy-chested defender we need," said Hudson. Trying to live up to that praise, Ivanov was sent off in the first pre-season game, then suffered a hernia that will sideline him for a month. Ivanov arrived via DC's new Bulgarian connection: player-coach Hristo Stoichkov. Salary cap limits dictated the departure of two stars: defender Eddie Pope and forward Jaime Moreno. New arrivals are Mike Petke and Dema Kovalenko, plus US national team star Earnie Stewart, getting his first taste of MLS action. DC have a fine quartet of younger players in Ben Olsen, Bobby Convey, Santino Quaranta and top college draft signing Alecko Eskandarian.

- To return to glory days of 1996-98, DC need super season from Marco Etcheverry – lone survivor of that era.

KANSAS CITY WIZARDS

Two veteran US national team defenders have gone: Peter Vermes retired at 36, Mike Burns (32) released. But 40-year-old Preki remains and is still a goalscoring force. Add in last year's foreign signings – forwards Igor Simutenkov (Russia, 4 goals) and Dario Fabbro (Argentina, 6) – and new signing Josh Wolff, and coach Bob Gansler has plenty of firepower. The growing maturity of two younger talents – midfielder Francisco Gomez and defender Nick Garcia – is a big plus. Goalkeeper Tony Meola, at 34, is still arguably MLS's best.

Eye for goals...Carlos Ruiz

- All-round strength should give Wizards good shot at title.

LOS ANGELES GALAXY

The defending champions are virtually unchanged – all players who took part in last year's Final are back, plus new signing, 33-year-old South Korean World Cup captain Hong Myung-bo. Crucially, they include leading goalscorer Carlos Ruiz. It's the final year for Mauricio Cienfuegos, diminutive El Salvadoran and resident midfield brain since 1996, who is to move into coaching. Looking to the future, coach Sigi Schmid signed 17-year-old Guillermo Gonzalez, leading scorer for the USA's Under-17 team.

- If Ruiz can lay waste to every opposing defence, as he did in 2002, Galaxy must be favourites to retain championship.

METROSTARS

New coach Bob Bradley (ex-Chicago Fire) – the club's seventh in eight years – will not find it easy breathing life into what has stubbornly remained an MLS disaster area. His first, rather bizarre, move was to bring in Mo Johnson (no coaching experience) as assistant. Major signings are defender Eddie Pope and forward Jaime Moreno, both from DC United. Bradley has talked of building the team around Clint Mathis – but Mathis remains an injury-prone enigma. The absurd decision to give keeper Tim Howard the maximum salary (around £190,000) has limited MetroStars' ability to sign other top players. Family fortunes are in the air – on trial are Kenny Arena (son of national team coach Bruce Arena), and Johnny Etcheverry (nephew of DC's famous Marco).

- Team's spine – Howard, Pope, Mathis, Moreno – as good as any. Supporting cast nowhere near. Much depends on undependable Mathis.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

Last year's amazing turnaround story. When, in an early season coaching change, Steve Nicol took over from Fernando Clavijo, Revs were struggling. Yet Nicol took them on an unlikely run of victories all the way to the Final. Much of the success was due to the astonishing form of young American Taylor Twellman, MLS's leading goalscorer. Twellman will be back, possibly alongside Joe-Max Moore, the only major signing. But Moore has already cast a mildly critical eye at Nicol's route-one style. He has a point: last year's Revs were not exactly an artistic triumph. But all the players are back, so more of the same seems likely.

Enigmatic...Clint Mathis

- In seven years, beaten MLS finalists have twice returned to win the following year. To add to the tradition, Revs will need another torrent of goals from Twellman.

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

The 2001 champions had the second best League record last year but folded tamely in the play-offs. A warning, possibly, that some changes were needed. But none has been made. Key defenders Jeff Agoos and Troy Dayak, now 35 and 32, remain, though keeper Joe Cannon and defender Wade Barrett have left for Europe. Signings include untried youngsters – defender Scott Dunivant (Stanford University) and 17-year-old left-sided midfielder Arturo Alvarez. Hopes of another title for coach Frank Yallop's team depend on Landon Donovan – World Cup star and poster-boy who suffers from an increasing burden of off-field activities.

- Too many question marks in too many positions for Quakes to be anything but outsiders.

Schafer handed ultimatum

Mark Gleeson rounds up the news from across the continent

CAMEROON'S national coach Winfried Schafer was ordered to take up residence in the country or lose his job after the team were hammered 3-0 by Ivory Coast in their first match since the World Cup finals. The German's assistant, Thomas Nkono, was sacked after the friendly, played in Chateauroux, France, in mid-February.

League champions Canon Yaounde have signed a co-operation agreement with Lokeren of Belgium.

EAST AFRICA

Former **KENYAN** Under-17s coach Tom Olaba has been banned for two years for getting government officials to falsify the passports of over-age players so that they could compete in the recent African championship qualifiers. Kenya withdrew from the preliminaries on government orders and two players were arrested for fraudulently obtaining passports.

Unheralded 35-year-old German Michael Nees has taken over as **SEYCHELLES** coach after the departure of Dominique Bathenay to Sedan in France.

Masindo Msolla is the new coach of **TANZANIA**.

In and out again...Samuel Kuffour

NORTH AFRICA

Esperance have won the **TUNISIAN** championship for the sixth successive season with five games to spare.

Ex-Marseille player Bernard Casoni has been fired by Stade Tunisien – his second sacking in Tunisia within a year.

Siddik Umdah, coach of **SUDAN'S** Al Merreikh, has died in a car accident travelling back from a match in Kassala.

EGYPTIAN international Ahmed Salah Hosny has left Belgium's Gent to return to Cairo and a new career at Al Ahly.

Former African Footballer of the Year Victor Ikpeba has quit **LIBYA'S** Al Ittihad saying he was not paid what he had been promised when he signed last year. Cameroon striker Patrick Mboma has followed the Nigerian out of the club, in his case to Tokyo Verdy in Japan.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Mafa Ramakau has agreed to take charge of **LESOTHO** again – a year after he was fired. His original replacement, Monaheng Monyane, resigned after last October's 6-0 Nations Cup thrashing by Gambia.

Clive Barker, who won the 1996 African Nations Cup with **SOUTH AFRICA**, has been fired by top division side Manning Rangers. Roger Feutmba, a member of Cameroon's Italia 90 squad, has taken over from Brazilian Djalma Cavalcante as coach of Mamelodi Sundowns.

Do what we say...Winfried Schafer is under threat from his Cameroon bosses

Augusto Matine, who resigned as coach of **MOZAMBIQUE** last October, has taken over at champions Ferroviario Maputo. Another former national team coach, Arnaldo Salvado, is now in charge of Maxaquene.

Costa do Sol beat Ferroviario 3-2 on penalties after a 1-1 aggregate draw to win the Super Cup.

MALAWI striker Mike Maganga has died after a car accident in which his Wanderers team-mate Maxwell Chirwa was seriously injured.

Manzini Wanderers won their third **SWAZILAND** League title in five years, beating Mhlambayatsi Rovers 1-0 in a play-off.

WEST AFRICA

Bayern Munich's Samuel Kuffour accepted a call-up from **GHANA** for the first time since he was kicked out of the squad at the 2002 African Nations Cup finals for disciplinary reasons. However, he later withdrew because of "family problems".

Burkhard Ziese is the new national coach, returning for a second spell. Meanwhile, Ghana have told Nigeria they no longer wish to enter a joint bid to host the 2010 World Cup finals.

Former African Footballer of the Year Abdul Razak has been named coach of Ghana's Asante Kotoko, runners-up in last year's African Cup-winners Cup. He was formerly at Stade Malien, who have appointed another former Ghana international, Mohamed Polo.

LIBERIAN club LISCR have been banned from continental competition for three years for prematurely pulling out of this year's CAF Cup. The country's other entrant in African club competition, Mighty Blue Angels, were disqualified from the Cup-winners Cup for failing to meet the player registration deadline.

COSAFA CASTLE CUP

Returning Viktor scrapes win

VIKTOR BONDARENKO returned to a rapturous welcome from the fans of Mozambique, but his first match back in charge – a COSAFA Castle Cup first-round tie against Lesotho – almost ended in ignominious failure. Only a 5-4 win on penalties spared the Russian coach's blushes and put his team into the quarter-finals.

Bondarenko had won popularity when steering Mozambique to the 1996 African Nations Cup finals in South Africa during his previous spell in charge, although he quit before the tournament started in a row over bonuses. Winning several national championships with Maputo club Costa do Sol, plus his characteristic bellow of "attack, attack, attack" from the touchline and at media conferences, have increased his popularity.

As a consequence, Bondarenko got a huge round of applause as he blew kisses to the fans before the Lesotho game at Maputo's Machava stadium, but he almost got egg on his face from the plucky visitors.

What was expected to be a routine assignment for Mozambique turned into a frustrating afternoon for the 20,000-odd spectators, who watched with increasing frustration as the home side's dominance failed to turn into goals. At first, there were cheers as the Mambas, fielding eight Europe-based players, threatened to overrun lowly-ranked Lesotho, but the visitors defended impressively and looked dangerous during occasional breakaways. Bondarenko and his staff celebrated furiously after Leholonolo Seema missed the last of Lesotho's five penalties but the Russian's relief was plain for all to see.

A week earlier, Botswana caused an upset by beating Namibia away to record their first victory in the seven-year history of the annual southern African championship. An early goal by Tshepiso Molwantwa was enough to secure victory over the Namibians, who hit the woodwork three times in the second half and missed numerous easy chances.

The last of the first round matches will be played in Harare on April 20 when Zimbabwe host Angola.

Mark Gleeson

Pro-file Shabani Nonda

One-time asylum seeker firing Monaco in their championship bid

A ONE-TIME asylum seeker who hero-worshipped Chris Waddle as a kid is pulling scouts from all over western Europe to Monaco. Not that anyone in soccer's jet-set needs much of an excuse to visit the rich principality in the south of France. But many more than usual have been making the trek to check out the remarkable talent that is Shabani Nonda.

The tall, powerful striker has scored the goals that have turned Didier Deschamps' team from relegation candidates last season into potential champions. But no one who goes to watch Nonda has made any sort of a journey to compare with his own odyssey from the tiny war-torn, central African nation of Burundi.

Nonda, the youngest of nine children, was born and brought up in the capital, Bujumbura, though his parents were from Zaire (now DR Congo). Football was part of his life from an early age. "When I was a kid everything revolved around football. When Marseille were on TV just about everything stopped so we could watch Basile Boli and Chris Waddle," he recalls.

In 1992, when Nonda was 15, everything changed as ethnic fighting erupted. Nonda's parents returned to Kinshasa in Zaire while 'Shaba', an uncle and a brother sought asylum in Tanzania. Nonda went to stay with relatives in Dar es Salaam, where he had a trial with top local club Young Africans. He was picked out of 50 kids and within a year was in the first team, thrilled to receive win bonuses. "At 15, in Africa, with $100 in your pocket, you're a king," he says.

As a consequence, training was not high on Nonda's list of priorities. "I'm afraid I was a bit of a lad," he says. "I was always out late enjoying myself and was too tired to train the next morning. It hadn't dawned on me that being a footballer meant responsibilities to your club and to your team-mates."

Meanwhile, Nonda's two-goal display in an African club cup game against South Africans Vaal Professionals so impressed the opposition that they offered him a contract. The transfer meant moving to Johannesburg, which Nonda found daunting. He spoke no English and lived in Sharpeville, which was still scarred by the apartheid-era massacre. "The football was hard as well," he says. "It was a level above anything I had been used to. I'd never trained twice a day. I couldn't take it. I went home to Kinshasa. I had saved a bit of money, but, of course, it didn't last, so back I went to Jo'burg."

He went on scoring, though, and secured a move to Swiss club FC Zurich in January 1996.

Many African players are given scant help in adjusting to life abroad, but Nonda was lucky. He says: "The coach, Raimundo Ponte, took me into his home and he and his family looked after me." Nonda settled in and started scoring goals, and it was on a French scout's recommendation that Rennes picked him up for £2million. "For me, playing in French football was the peak," he says. "A dream come true."

Just over 30 goals in two seasons earned a move on to Monaco, which, initially, threatened to be a disaster. Nonda says: "Team spirit was really bad. Everybody blamed everyone else. For two years it was awful. Now, at last, it's much better and we're in with a chance of winning the League. I wouldn't say the players are all best buddies but we've got a good working relationship and that shows in our results."

Nonda, with 17 goals to the end of March, is in line to take the League top scorer award. Whether he can copy that form into international football is another question. Nonda says: "I play for DR Congo because of my family ties but when I was first picked it was hopeless. The Europe-based players were put in the best hotels and the home-based players were stuck in a dormitory. You can't build a team like that, so I told them I wouldn't play again. But I've been promised changes. We'll see."

In 1974 DR Congo, then Zaire, became the first black African nation to reach the World Cup finals. But before the 2006 qualifiers start, Nonda must resolve his club future, particularly given Monaco's financial problems. "My ambition," says Nonda, "is to play in the Champions League next season, be it with Monaco or abroad. I've heard whispers about Italian, Spanish and English clubs looking at me. Even if they never buy me, just to know that they looked is terrific."

Keir Radnedge

Fact file

Club Monaco (Fra)
Country DR Congo
Born March 6, 1977, in Bujumbura, Burundi
Previous clubs Young Africans (Tan), Vaal Professionals (SAf), FC Zurich (Swi), Rennes (Fra)
International debut April 2000, v Djibouti

Dalian carry flag for big four

Michael Church on the surprise Champions League exit of clubs from Asia's most successful countries

WHEN the group stages of the Asian Champions League finally kicked off in March, few would have expected the subsequent semi-final line-up to feature just one club from the four nations that represented Asia at the last World Cup.

Yet, with the elimination of Japanese duo Kashima Antlers and Shimizu S-Pulse, Korean sides Songnam Chunma and Daejeon Citizen as well as Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, only China are represented in the last four of the continent's newest and most lucrative club competition.

Chinese champions Dalian Shide are now the favourites to lift the £350,000 first prize after winning Group B, which also comprised big-spending Songnam, Shimizu and Thai whipping-boys Osotspa. They now face a home-and-away semi-final showdown with UAE side Al Ain, led by former Senegal coach Bruno Metsu, in April.

Onwards and upwards...Dalian's Hao Haidong celebrates a goal against Songnam

It is the fourth time Dalian have reached the last four of a continental club competition, but despite their domestic dominance – seven titles in nine seasons – they have never won a continental tournament. The closest they have come was in 1998, when they lost the Asian Club Championship Final on penalties to Koreans Pohang Steelers, but they now have a realistic chance of ending that drought.

The winners of the tie between the Chinese and United Arab Emirates champions will meet either Thailand's BEC Tero Sasana or Pakhtakor of Uzbekistan, both of whom have surprised more illustrious opponents.

BEC, domestic champions for the past two seasons, surprisingly overcame Kashima, China's Shanghai Shenhua and Daejeon Citizen to top Group A in the heat and humidity of Bangkok. The Uzbeks knocked out top Iranian side Pirouzi, Al Talaba from Iraq and Turkmenistan's Nisa.

Not surprisingly, the Asian confederation has claimed the competition to be a success so far, with capacity crowds turning out for many of the group matches. But with clubs from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea all missing from the final shake-up, the semi-finals lack some of the lustre of previous tournaments. The competition needs to be reworked slightly, perhaps allowing two teams to progress from the group stage rather than just one, with the implementation of a quarter-final stage.

Even so, the AFC deserves credit for ensuring the competition would not be cheapened by an influx of mercenaries hired only for the sake of the Champions League. Players who did not meet the strict tournament regulations were not allowed to appear, including World Cup winner Romario. The Brazilian signed a three-month loan deal with Qatar's Al Sadd a few weeks before the tournament was due to kick off, clearly not fulfilling the AFC's stipulations that players had to be registered one month before the group stages began and that they had to be on a contract of at least six months.

As a result, Romario, who cost the Doha-based club £1million in wages and incentives, turned out to be nothing more than a highly-paid spectator of Al Sadd's Champions League games against Al Hilal, Al Ain and Esteghlal of Iran. Romario played merely a handful of Qatari League matches before signifying his intention to return to Rio de Janeiro as a result of the war in Iraq.

Shanghai Shenhua were similarly denied the services of one of their expensive acquisitions, former Rangers midfielder Jorg Albertz.

The confederation's firmness on the issue underlined its determination to protect its new club competition. And while more still needs to be done to hone the product, the Asian Champions League is proving a step in the right direction.

OCEANIA

Olympic steal the Glory

PERTH GLORY missed the chance of topping **AUSTRALIA'S** final regular season table after a shock 2-0 defeat at bottom-placed Marconi. Instead, defending champions Sydney Olympic took over after beating Adelaide City 3-0 at home.

Finishing top meant Olympic headed into the play-offs with six bonus points under a new system for the championship-deciding stage. Glory, who finished a point behind, received three bonus points, while the four other qualifiers – Newcastle United, Parramatta Power, Adelaide City and Northern Spirit – began with nothing in their accounts. The six sides play each other twice in the play-off mini-league with the top two contesting the Grand Final.

Spirit's qualification was the most remarkable since they were bottom of the 13-team table just after the halfway stage. The Sydneysiders' form improved markedly as their veteran Scottish warhorses Ian Ferguson and Stewart Petrie became more influential. Ferguson gained 10 League championship winners' medals during his time with Rangers, but few pundits expect him to carry off the Australian title this year. Most predict a second successive Glory-Olympic Grand Final.

In **NEW ZEALAND**, Central United continued their revival with a 7-0 annihilation of Tauranga City United. This was an exact reversal of the 2002 scoreline between the clubs and meant Central headed the League table from newly-created East Auckland – though only on goal difference – with champions Miramar Rangers four points adrift.

Ba's 7-1 demolition of Nadi in **FIJI'S** season-opening Champion v Champion Series proved a poor indicator for form in the League's opening weeks. Ba languished fourth from bottom – their worst start for more than a decade – while Nadi, now coached by Solomon Islander Batram Suri, held a one-point lead over Rewa at the top.

Brett Emerton's role in Feyenoord's UEFA Cup triumph was recognised when the Australian was voted 2002 **OCEANIA FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR**. Compatriots Harry Kewell (Leeds) and Mark Schwarzer (Middlesbrough) were second and third.

Paul Moon

Jubilant Jubilo...the Iwata players savour their Super Cup triumph

JAPAN

Jubilo make Super recovery

JUBILO IWATA bounced straight back from their poor performance in the Far East Club Championship by convincingly beating Kyoto Purple Sanga to lift the Japanese Super Cup. The J.League champions won 3-0 against the Emperor's Cup holders in the season-opening game.

Jubilo had failed to score during their three defeats in the Far East tournament – against the South Korean and Chinese champions, plus Japanese rivals Kashima Antlers. But they made light work of Kyoto. Their opponents did give them a few scares during the first half, but Jubilo never looked back after Toshiya Fujita put them ahead on the hour. Brazilian striker Gral set up Fujita, who returned the compliment by helping Gral score the next two.

"We have had four defeats in a row, including a training game," said Jubilo manager Masaaki Yanagishita, "so we are very pleased to have won. Although we got no results in the Far East tournament, we showed signs of playing the way I wanted. There was much better movement today, and more stamina. We're not there yet, but a start has been made."

The game was a disappointment for Kyoto, fifth in the overall standings last season – their best placing – in their first year back in Division One. They clearly missed South Korea World Cup midfielder Park Ji-sung, who has rejoined his World Cup boss, Guus Hiddink, at PSV Eindhoven. Park's compatriot An Hyo-yeon has also left, meaning Kyoto have no foreign players, an extraordinary situation in today's J.League.

Doubts have now been cast on whether Brazilian World Cup-winner Cafu will come to Japan to play for Yokohama F Marinos this summer. Marinos announced they had signed the Roma defender on a six-month contract from July. But the Brazilian's agent has suggested the deal is far from finalised, talking of rival interest from clubs in Italy, England and Spain.

Mike Plastow & Yumiko Nagae

Asian round-up

AFGHANISTAN recorded their first victory since returning to the international scene from self-imposed exile when defeating Kyrgyzstan in the opening Asian Cup qualifying match in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu. Sayeed Tahir Shah and Farid Azami struck for the Afghans in the 2-1 win, although it was not enough to secure a place in the first round proper. That went to Nepal, who qualified from the three-team group to face South Korea, Oman and Vietnam in the next phase.

Meanwhile, **EAST TIMOR** made their debut in Asian competition, losing 3-2 to Sri Lanka in Colombo. Jayasuriya scored the winner in the 89th minute.

South-east Asia's primary regional competition, the **TIGER CUP**, has been revamped by the ASEAN Football Federation. The tournament, which features the 10 members of the Association of South-east Asian Nations, has until now been played in a fixed location. This will still apply to the group stages of the 2004 edition, which will be co-hosted by Malaysia and Cambodia. However, the semi-finals and Final will be played on a home-and-away basis in an attempt to boost interest in the competition.

Indonesia and Singapore co-hosted the last edition in December, with Thailand defeating the Indonesians in a penalty shoot-out to win the trophy for the third time in four tournaments.

German Wolfgang Sidka has resigned as coach of **BAHRAIN**, citing health problems. The 48-year-old, who had been expected to take charge during the Asian Cup qualifiers, has been replaced by former French international Yves Herbet.

Former Dutch international Pieter Hamberg has replaced Jan Versaleyin as head coach of Abu Dhabi's Al Jazeira in the **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**. Former national team coach Tini Ruijs has been fired by Al Wahda after failing to win the League. They finished five points behind champions Al Ain. Romanian Ilie Blacci is returning to the Emirates to take charge of Al Ahli next season, while Brazilian Arthur Bernardes will return to Al Wasl.

Former Asian Player of the Year Khodadad Azizi has been banned for six months by the **IRANIAN** federation after an incident during a League match. Azizi, currently playing for First Division side Pas, was punished after instigating a fight with Foolad's Mehdi Poorghorbanof.

Adnan Hamd has been appointed head coach of **IRAQ'S** Olympic team. He takes over from German Bernd Stange, who left Iraq during the build-up to hostilities.

Perak's 1-0 victory over Terengganu courtesy of a Yusri Che Lah goal put them top of the **MALAYSIAN** League for the first time this year.

INDIA captain Baichung Bhutia was set to miss the Asian Cup preliminary group matches against North Korea after undergoing knee surgery. In the League, JCT Mills ended East Bengal's 17-match unbeaten run with a 2-0 victory. Despite the defeat, East Bengal still led the table by nine points from Vasco Sports Club, who inflicted a home defeat on defending champions Mohun Bagan.

Michael Church, Azam Mahmood & G C Das

Banned...Khodadad Azizi

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Brian Glanville's LAST WORD

Found wanting...Pascal Cygan has looked fallible in the Gunners' back line

'Quite why Cygan was signed at all remains a mystery. He has neither the pace nor positional sense to be anything like the central defender Arsenal need'

There's no defence for Wenger's bad buys

WHEN Arsenal, in the space of a few days, failed to beat a 10-man Roma team at Highbury then crashed at Ewood Park against Blackburn Rovers, their manager, Arsene Wenger, may have regretted all his gung-ho ebullience, his buoyant optimism, in previous weeks. Birds, you might think, had come home to roost. Chickens, to vary the metaphor, had been counted before they were hatched.

Arsenal, having failed dismally to win any of their three home matches in the second group stage of the Champions League, were left, with a weakened team, to avoid defeat in Valencia to make sure of reaching the quarter-finals, a challenge they failed. In the process, a harsh, bright light had been shone both on the side's true potential and on Wenger's erratic transfer policy.

Bringing Thierry Henry and Robert Pires to Highbury, to play alongside their powerful compatriot Patrick Vieira, certainly overshadows any mistakes that have been made. But made they surely were. Against Roma and Blackburn, the defensive failings of Pascal Cygan and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst were all too embarrassingly clear. Quite why Cygan was signed at all remains a mystery. He has neither the pace nor the positional sense to be anything like the central defender Arsenal need. He looked fallible against Roma, especially when their goal was scored by Antonio Cassano; he looked inept at Blackburn. Guilty for his part in their first goal, he committed the unforgiveable sin of turning his back on the ball as Tugay was about to shoot and score Blackburn's second.

In both games, Van Bronckhorst looked wretchedly out of position at left-back – though it is hardly his fault since he is really a midfielder. At Blackburn, Keith Gillespie went past him at will, and let us not forget Roma should, even with 10 men, have won at Highbury when criminally lax defending enabled Cafu to cross from the right, only for Vincenzo Montella to waste a free header.

True, the injured Sol Campbell and Ashley Cole missed both games. But where was the adequate cover? Why was Matthew Upson, surely a better bet than Cygan and that other dud buy, the fallible Latvian Igors Stepanovs, allowed to leave for Birmingham City?

Murray mad to go Howard's way

IT IS nearly half a century since Len Shackleton, that marvellous maverick inside-forward, devoted to his autobiography *Clown Prince of Soccer* a chapter headed 'The Average Director's Knowledge of Football'. It consisted of a blank page.

Shack, of course, was playing for Sunderland then, and it is Sunderland, again, who have just provided compelling evidence that nothing has changed.

What in the name of all that is logical persuaded their benighted chairman Bob Murray to appoint Howard Wilkinson as manager in place of Peter Reid? I like Wilkinson and am well aware of his championship-winning achievement at Leeds United. But that was a long time ago, and his performance at the Football Association in recent years should have warned any halfway sensible director that, as a club manager, he had little else to offer.

Put in charge of coaching at the FA, Wilkinson notoriously and disastrously elbowed aside the highly-successful England Under-21 manager Peter Taylor, took over himself, and reduced the team to demoralised failure. Put in charge of England's team for a vital World Cup game in Finland, he distinguished himself by leaving Michael Owen on the bench throughout a 0-0 draw. He then gloomily declared England had no hope of qualifying for the 2002 World Cup.

At Sunderland, things went exactly as you might have expected. Poor, deluded Murray actually went to Wilkinson to ask who should succeed Reid, and Wilkinson, astonishingly suggesting himself, was appointed. Those whom the gods would destroy, said the ancients, they first make mad. Or football club chairmen.

Little to offer...Howard Wilkinson

Will he, won't he?...Tigana is unclear about his future at Fulham

Fulham in state of flux

AFTER Fulham drew an extraordinary Premiership match at Loftus Road against Southampton, whose last-gasp equaliser came after their splendid Finnish goalkeeper Antti Niemi came up for a corner and hit the bar, Jean Tigana gave an enigmatic interview.

Would he stay as Fulham's manager or would he go, when the season ends? Hard to tell, indeed, as he ducked and dived.

Yes, he would like to stay; it was stay or stop. No, he had not signed the new contract reportedly offered him by the club. Why? He didn't know. But he had written to them and was waiting for an answer.

Perhaps some light was thrown on the subject when next day one read a report that the club's owner, Mohamed Fayed, was thinking of leaving Britain should his appeal against the Inland Revenue's tax demands fail. Moreover, the fact that the jewel in his commercial crown, Harrods, has been shipping water of late prompts one to think his huge benefactions to Fulham would have to be reduced if not withdrawn altogether.

For the vexed problem of just where to play drags on. It seems that dear old picturesque Craven Cottage is unlikely ever to be rebuilt, while a possible move to share with neighbours Chelsea remains obstructed by the covenant that prevents Chelsea doing any such thing; unless the local council relents.

The problem is exacerbated for Fulham in that the club's gifted French contingent – Steed Malbranque, Steve Marlet, Sylvain Legwinski and the rest – have intimated that should Tigana go, they would want to go too.

Hear, hear for radio calcio

ONE of the joys of Spectrum Radio, the little London radio station, is that every Sunday you can listen directly to *calcio minuto per minuto* (football minute by minute), broadcast from Italy. Immensely superior to its prehistoric BBC equivalent, which still concentrates largely on a single match, the Italian equivalent jumps from one match to another. But I do wish that its commentators would learn to pronounce the English word assist. One and all without exception say it 'a-ssist', with the accent on the 'a'.

Wrong verdict on 'goal judges'

DAVID DAVIES, the FA's acting chief executive, was understandably disappointed when, in March, the International Board turned down the idea, dear to himself and Michel Platini, of having technological 'goal judges'. They'd certainly have validated the goal refused Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in their recent FA Cup tie against Leeds. But history repeats itself; at vast distance. There used to be goal judges seated on a chair beside a goal with a tape for a crossbar away back in the 19th century. Would they have confirmed that 1966 World Cup Final goal by Geoff Hurst?

Coppell decries Goldstone 'rape'

WILL Brighton and Hove Albion get their new ground at Falmer? As the First Division club's highly effective, resourceful and intelligent manager Steve Coppell says, it would be their salvation. The double sale of the good old Goldstone Ground in Hove, where Albion had been playing for 95 years, has variously been described by the former Manchester United and England star as "the crime of the century" and "a rape".

The Goldstone was initially sold for just £7 million. It was then re-sold to Abbey Life for £24m and turned into a shopping precinct. This left Albion with nowhere to play, condemned them to a couple of seasons far away at Gillingham in Kent and almost saw them slip out of the Football League – only a last-ditch win over Hereford kept them there.

Coppell believes that, had they dropped into the Conference, it would have been the end. In the event they survived and have found a picturesque but wholly inadequate temporary home in the suburbs at Withdean, its capacity a little over 6,000.

"There is that survival instinct clubs cling to," says Coppell. "If we get permission to build this new stadium, the public will take off. Then we will be a yo-yo club again, fighting to get out of the First Division, then striving to survive in the Premiership."

The moral of the whole horrid affair of the Goldstone, he says, is that clubs and their grounds should never be separated; a recipe for doom and disaster "because in every case it's happened – Brighton, Wimbledon – it's been the death knell of the club." A public inquiry at Hove, lasting more than a month and a half, will pronounce on whether Brighton can build in Falmer next September.

Past glories...the run-down Goldstone Ground before its demolition

May 1973

AJAX, chasing a hat-trick of European Cup Final victories, were the team of the moment 30 years ago, even though Austria featured on the cover, though not inside the magazine.

Ajax may have been the best side of recent seasons, but Eric Batty was struggling to understand a new term that was being used to describe the style of play in Amsterdam: total football.

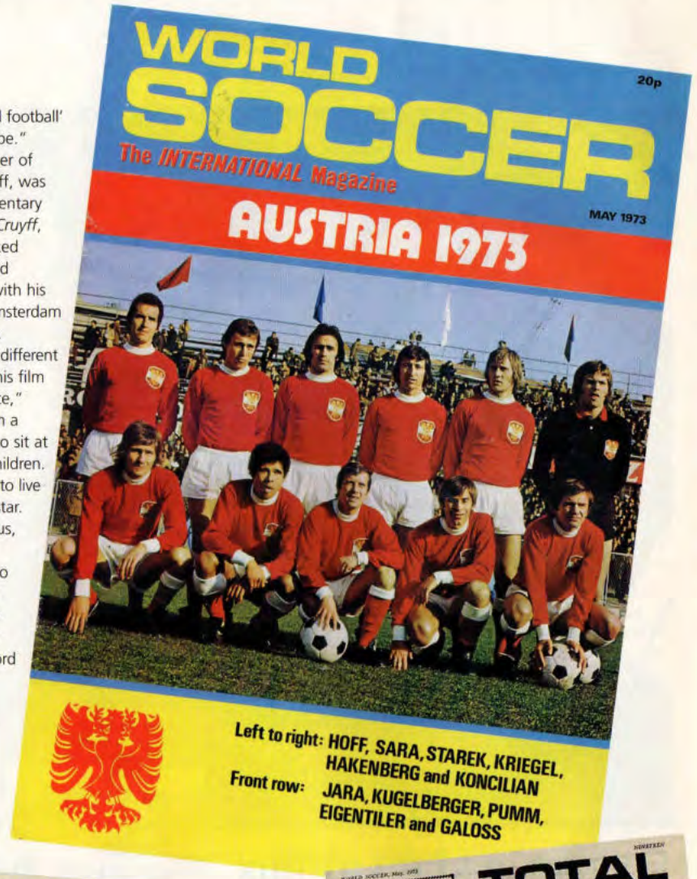
"Certainly there is an air of magic about the way Ajax play," Batty wrote. "But to suggest, as the word total implies, that Ajax are the ultimate in football is quite erroneous. For one thing, they are suspect in goal, and I also have reservations about the temperament of some of their key players.

"Ajax's midfield trio are all highly-skilled individuals who play the ball to feet. This is where it all starts...in midfield. And it's all bound up in skill and belief. The sooner this is accepted and high-sounding phrases like 'total football' rejected, the better it will be."

The most talented player of that Ajax side, Johan Cruyff, was starring in his own documentary film, *Number 14 – Johan Cruyff*, which was playing to packed cinemas across Holland and featured Cruyff at home with his parents and visiting the Amsterdam suburb where he grew up.

"I lead two completely different lives, and I am glad that this film has found the right balance," said Cruyff. "Privately, I am a rather shy man and I like to sit at home with my wife and children. But publicly I realise I have to live up to my reputation as a star. The pressures are enormous, but I think I can cope."

Ajax, of course, were to beat Juventus in the 1973 European Cup Final, while Cruyff was to move on to Barcelona for a world-record fee later that year.



SIXTEEN WORLD SOCCER, May, 1973

'NUMBER 14–JOHAN CRUYFF'

Footballer turned film-star

by MARIUS VAN RIJN

THOUSANDS of Dutch soccer fans have been queueing up during recent weeks to see the first full-length feature film that has ever been made around the lonely figure of a soccer star. A real one, that is, not the product of an inventive scriptwriter. And not only soccer fans. A surprising number of people who normally would never undertake the trip to Amsterdam's grey Olympic Stadium or Ajax's cosy ground, now seem prepared to pay almost £2 for a glance at the genius of Johan Cruyff, at 26 regarded as the most talented player in today's game.

A look at the long queues outside Amsterdam's City Theatre, where the film "*Number 14—Johan Cruyff*" is shown, reveals some unlikely fans: elegantly dressed young men and women who would be better in place at the ballet and opera building not far away from the City Theatre in Amsterdam's most lively square kilometer around the Leidseplein.

The film, made by award-winning Dutch director Bond van Buuren and Holland's leading soccer-writer Maarten de Vos, is a mixture of an intimate look at the life at the top of Johan Cruyff, his background in one of Amsterdam's poorer districts and many beautiful slow-motion shots of Cruyff in full action.

The ballet-like virtuosity of these slow-motion shots are in fact the highlights of the film. The only criticism here could be, that the romantic, angel-like music in the background is a bit of a cliche.

The many interviews with Cruyff that Maarten de Vos had revealed little new about the Ajax star, his philosophy or about his approach to the game.

The figure of Cruyff has over the past few years been so much publicised, especially in Holland, that there is hardly any surprise left. Johan Cruyff appears as a dedicated, total professional. His sense of responsibility to Ajax and his colleagues in the side probably attribute as much to his soccer genius as his undoubted skills. His rather fragile frame makes him an unlikely forward in today's game, but much of that is compensated by his tremendous skill and his capability of avoiding hard tackles.

Balance

"I lead two completely different lives," Johan Cruyff said after seeing the film for the first time. "And I am glad that this film has found the right balance between the two. Privately I am a rather shy man and I like to sit at home with my wife and two children. But publicly I realise I have to live up to my reputation as a star, however hard I find that sometimes. The pressures are enormous, but I think I can cope." Maybe that is the secret to Cruyff's success story. He can cope.

After his first few years as the "*enfant terrible*" in the Ajax side, where he made his debut at 15, he soon settled down to an ordinary married life. Financial difficulties with Ajax were resolved through a long running contract, with guarantees for a £100,000 lump sum when he retires. These two stabilising factors—emotional and financial security—have undoubtedly contributed to the constant progress in Johan's soccer.

Architect

From the daring, almost arrogant humor for goals, fame and glory he has slowly developed into an intelligent architect of the game. He reserves his undiminished goal-scoring abilities for special matches or for the rare occasion Ajax run into trouble. For the rest Johan Cruyff is satisfied to present the team around him with unbelievable through - balls, accurate passes, chances and encouragement.

"This film to me was quite revealing," he says, "I have of course seen TV and other films about me. But this time I am exposed naked. You can see me make terrible mistakes, apart from a few nice moves they have shot. Especially revealing is a five minute scene of me in continuous battle with Orlalin of Inter Milan. That shows exactly what kind of opposition I can expect. It is a hard, brutal sequence of pushing, grabbing, pulling and even beating out of which I finally emerge with a good header.

"But from the stands the public probably think: come on, Johan, get yourself out of that mess." He has his frustrations. In the film he admits: "Frankly, I don't think I ever played a very good match. The few times I have been near it, Press and public probably did not notice".

"Number 14 — Johan Cruyff" was originally planned as a half-hour TV-film. By the time this concept was to be carried out things started to happen to Ajax. Twice in succession the Amsterdam team conquered the European Cup, the highest Cup-glory of them all.

Full-length

The improvement of Ajax in general and of Cruyff in particular was such, that a full-length feature film seemed to do more justice to the subject. In a way this change of mind did not do the film a great deal of good. In some parts the original approach as a TV-film is still visible.

Technically the film is not too brilliant either. The original 16 millimetre film had to be blown up to the 35 millimetre used in the cinemas which results in weaker colours and sharpness. But still, the film has enough appeal to people inside and outside soccer to guarantee a successful run in the Dutch cinemas and later probably in British and other European theatres.

For Johan Cruyff—mysteriously absent when Ajax lost 2-1 in Bayern Munich, which, by the way, did not stop Ajax's steady progress to this year's European Cup Final—the film "*Number 14 — Johan Cruyff*" (that 14 is his favourite shirt number) is just another step on his way to a well-deserved carefree, future.

Inside Johan Cruyff's home, with his parents, during shooting of the film.

Johan Cruyff with the neighbour who used to "beat him up" when the kids played football on the streets.

WORLD SOCCER, May, 1973 SIXTEEN

TOTAL FOOTBALL

...what is it?

by ERIC BATTY

FOR approximately a year now we've been indulged in debating by "total football" as the high league reality produced by Ajax Amsterdam. Unfortunately what it means though it's a phrase that seems to be in vogue at the moment is not clear. Most of the many articles about the problem have concluded that it means the ideal footballer.

Inside the play of Ajax that produces the pleasing and successful results, the ideal footballer is a composite of the individual qualities of the Ajax team. Ajax team is the team that comes to original full, the team that deserves.

Generally there is an air of magic about the way Ajax play. Their speed and their ease by which they can change from defence to attack, and vice versa, in Europe during the mind until, the ball, in contrast, in the mind until, the ball, in contrast, in the mind until, the ball, in contrast, in

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WORLD SOCCER ESSENTIAL GUIDE

TEAMS SQUADS TACTICS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS

Ajax
Barcelona
Internazionale
Juventus
Manchester United
Milan
Real Madrid
Valencia

WORLD SOCCER ESSENTIAL GUIDE

THE 2002-03 UEFA Champions League is the most important international competition being staged anywhere in the world this year. And the quarter-final draw (Man United v Real Madrid, Valencia v Inter, Milan v Ajax, Barcelona v Juventus) has thrown up some mouth-watering encounters.

The days running up to the games will be rife with rumour and speculation on team tactics and selections. With this booklet, we aim to provide you with all the information you need to make up your own mind. All statistics refer to games played in the first and second group phases of the 2002-03 UEFA Champions League.

TEAMS SQUADS TACTICS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS

4 Ajax
6 Barcelona
8 Internazionale
10 Juventus
12 Manchester United
14 Milan
16 Real Madrid
18 Valencia

AJAX

Zlatan Ibrahimovic

Ronald Koeman

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Ronald Koeman

Former Dutch international defender famous for scoring the winning goal for Barcelona in the 1992 European Cup Final. Started coaching career with Vitesse Arnhem and has long been tipped for a return to Barcelona.

● STADIUM

Amsterdam ArenA (cap 51,000). Spaceship-like stadium which was opened in 1996. Famous for its retractable roof and corresponding problems with the grass pitch. Locals miss the intimacy of the old De Meer stadium, but the ArenA still generates a terrific atmosphere when full.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Rafael Van der Vaart: the latest jewel in the Ajax crown.
Zlatan Ibrahimovic: fiery Swede with flair and great ability.
Cristian Chivu: captain and central defender whose maturity beyond his years typifies the Ajax spirit.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYER THIS SEASON

Steven Pienaar: streetwise South African who has carved out a place for himself in midfield.

● MOST DISAPPOINTING PLAYER THIS SEASON

Ahmed Hossam: the Egyptian striker, nicknamed Mido and a hero in his home country, has fallen out with Koeman and been forced to train with the youth team.

● GOALS

Ibrahimovic (5), **Van der Vaart** (2), **De Jong** (1), **Litmanen** (1), **Pasanen** (1), **Pienaar** (1), **Van der Meyde** (1).

● ASSISTS (leader)

Maxwell (2).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: Chivu (1), **Van Damme** (1), **Yakubu** (1).
Yellow cards: Chivu (4), **Galasek** (3), **Van der Meyde** (3), **De Jong** (2), **Hossam** (2), **Ibrahimovic** (2), **Lobont** (2), **Pienaar** (2), **Van der Vaart** (2), **Yakubu** (2), **Bergdolmo** (1), **Boukhari** (1), **Didulica** (1), **Pasanen** (1), **Sikora** (1), **Trabelsi** (1), **Van Halst** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Ibrahimovic (38), **Trabelsi** (25), **Hossam** (22), **Galasek** (22), **Van der Meyde** (19), **Van der Vaart** (17).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Trabelsi (22), **Pienaar** (20), **Galasek** (15).

● WEAKNESSES

Goalkeeper. Lobont has never entirely convinced.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

The club's debts may well force the sale of at least one key player: choose from Chivu, Van der Vaart or Ibrahimovic for starters.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

UNDER Koeman, Ajax play a more defensive game than has traditionally been the case. The famous 3-4-3 formation has been replaced by a more conservative 4-4-2, which is actually 5-3-2, with Galasek playing a wholly defensive role in midfield. But Ajax can still switch to 4-3-3 (option A).

However, emphasis is still placed on pace, one-touch play and attacking down the wings. The Romanian Chivu is the key man in central defence, with the Finn Pasanen or occasionally the Norwegian Bergdolmo alongside him. Trabelsi and O'Brien (just back from injury) are the regular full-backs.

Galasek's role as a defensive midfield shield allows for different options in attack. Ibrahimovic can play as the lone striker with Van der Meyde just behind (option B) or with two wider forwards (option A). Boukhari has recently been used a straight replacement for Ibrahimovic as Hossam has fallen out with Koeman. When Litmanen returns from injury, he will challenge Van der Vaart and the highly impressive Pienaar for a starting berth.

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
21	Joe DIDULICA (Aus)	14.10.77
41	Fred GRIM	17.08.65
1	Bogdan LOBONT (Rom)	18.01.78
31	Maarten STEKELENBURG	22.09.82
32	Henk TIMMER	03.12.71
	DEFENDERS	
3	Andre BERGDOLMO (Nor)	13.10.71
5	Cristian CHIVU (Rom)	26.10.80
26	Nigel DE JONG	30.11.84
18	John O'BRIEN (USA)	29.08.77
16	Petri PASANEN (Fin)	24.09.80
2	Hatem TRABELSI (Tun)	25.01.77
24	Jelle VAN DAMME (Blg)	10.10.83
22	Abubakari YAKUBU (Gha)	13.12.81
	MIDFIELDERS	
4	Tomas GALASEK (Cze)	15.01.73
20	Jari LITMANEN (Fin)	20.02.71
13	MAXWELL (Bra)	27.08.81
25	David MENDES	04.08.82
10	Steven PIENAAR (SAf)	17.03.82
30	Stefano SEEDORF	28.04.82
37	Wesley SNEIJDER	09.06.84
23	Rafael VAN DER VAART	11.02.83
8	Richard WITSCHGE	20.09.69
	FORWARDS	
28	Nourdin BOUKHARI	30.06.80
11	Ahmed HOSSAM (Egy)	23.02.83
9	Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC (Swe)	03.10.81
27	Victor SIKORA	11.04.78
7	Andy VAN DER MEYDE	30.09.79
17	WAMBERTO (Bra)	13.12.74
	COACH	
	Ronald KOEMAN	21.03.63

BARCELONA

Javier Saviola

Raddy Antic

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Radomir Antic

Serbian who made his name as a coach in Spain with Oviedo and then Atletico Madrid, where he won the League and Cup double in 1996. A nuts-and-bolts motivator noted for getting the most from his players. Replaced Louis Van Gaal at the start of February.

● STADIUM

Camp Nou (cap 98,600). The Catalan cathedral with gravity-defying seats in the top tier.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Patrick Kluivert: Dutch forward whose wages (£90,000 a week) could mean he leaves the club this summer.

Javier Saviola: Argentinian forward who has been in blistering form in recent weeks.

Philip Cocu: Dutch midfielder with technique and stamina.

● MOST DISAPPOINTING PLAYERS THIS SEASON

Gaizka Mendieta: midfielder who has not reproduced the dynamic performances of his Valencia days.

Frank De Boer: Dutch defender and Van Gaal favourite who looks to be heading out of the club this summer.

● BRIGHTEST HOPE

Andres Iniesta: teenage midfielder who is already making waves in the first team.

● GOALS

Saviola (6), **Kluivert** (5), **Dani Garcia** (2), **De Boer** (2), **Luis Enrique** (2), **Motta** (2), **Cocu** (1), **Geovanni** (1), **Gerard** (1), **Mendieta** (1), **Overmars** (1), **Riquelme** (1).

● ASSISTS (leaders)

Riquelme (4), **Xavi** (4), **Motta** (2), **Overmars** (2).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: none.

Yellow cards: Gabri (4), **Fernando** (3), **Cocu** (2), **Motta** (2), **Dani Tortolero** (1), **De Boer** (1), **Geovanni** (1), **Kluivert** (1), **Luis Enrique** (1), **Mendieta** (1), **Overmars** (1), **Puyol** (1), **Rochemback** (1), **Xavi** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Cocu (15), **Fernando** (15), **Mendieta** (14), **Rochemback** (14).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Saviola (29), **Motta** (19), **Puyol** (14).

● WEAKNESSES

A long injury list. New left-back Juan Pablo Sorin is ineligible for the Champions League. Terribly inconsistent – poor Liga form, excellent in the Champions League.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

The impending election, by club members, to decide who succeeds the departed Joan Gaspart as club president.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

RADDY ANTIC has switched to a 4-4-2 formation from the 4-3-3 favoured by Louis Van Gaal. That means a great use of Overmars and other wide men.

In goal, Antic has preferred the youngster Victor Valdes ahead of the Argentinian Bonano, while in defence his choices have been limited by injuries to key men (Puyol) and ineligibility (left-back Juan Pablo Sorin, signed from Lazio during the January transfer window). The Swede Andersson is the likely first choice in the centre alongside De Boer, with Reiziger on the left and Gabri on the right.

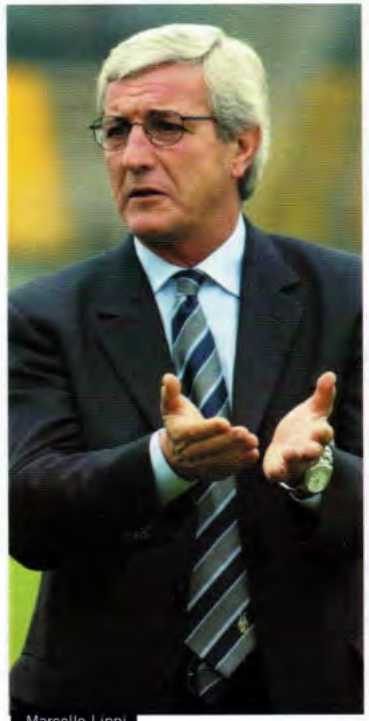
Xaxi is well established in defensive midfield, while Motta and Overmars provide other strong options. Saviola is the likely second striker to Kluivert (option A), but Riquelme could also be used, with Saviola providing width from the flank (option B).

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
1	Roberto BONANO (Arg)	24.01.70
25	Robert ENKE (Ger)	24.08.77
26	VICTOR VALDES	14.01.82
	DEFENDERS	
4	Patrik ANDERSSON (Swe)	18.08.71
12	Philippe CHRISTANVAL (Fra)	31.08.78
3	Frank DE BOER (Hol)	15.05.70
35	FERNANDO Navarro	25.06.82
32	OLEGUER Presas	02.02.80
5	Carlos PUYOL	13.04.78
2	Michael REIZIGER (Hol)	03.05.73
	MIDFIELDERS	
8	Philip COCU (Hol)	29.10.70
19	DANI Garcia	22.12.74
33	DANI Tortolero	06.09.81
18	GABRI Garcia	10.02.79
14	GERARD Lopez	12.03.79
34	Andres INIESTA	11.05.84
21	LUIS ENRIQUE	08.05.70
17	Gaizka MENDIETA	27.03.74
31	Thiago MOTTA	28.08.82
15	Fabio ROCHEMBACK (Bra)	10.12.81
36	David SANCHEZ	25.07.82
6	XAVI Hernandez	25.01.80
	FORWARDS	
22	GEOVANNI (Bra)	11.01.80
9	Patrick KLUIVERT (Hol)	01.07.76
11	Marc OVERMARS (Hol)	29.03.73
10	Juan RIQUELME (Arg)	24.06.78
7	Javier SAVIOLA (Arg)	11.12.81
	COACH	
	Radomir ANTIC (Ser)	22.11.48

JUVENTUS

Alessandro Del Piero


Marcello Lippi

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Marcello Lippi

Dapper Paul Newman lookalike who is back at Juventus, scene of his greatest triumphs, after an unsuccessful spell at Inter.

● STADIUM

Stadio delle Alpi (cap 69,000). Built for the 1990 World Cup but unloved by Juventus and Torino fans alike.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Alessandro Del Piero: Juve's golden boy who was playing some of the finest football of his career until hit by injury in February.

Pavel Nedved: goalscoring Czech playmaker who is having an outstanding season.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYER THIS SEASON

Mauro Camoranesi: Italo-Argentine recently capped by Italy.

● BRIGHTEST HOPE

Take your pick from across Italy and Europe, where Juve have 'parked' many talented youngsters such as Ivan Ergic at Basle and Fabrizio Miccoli at Perugia.

● GOALS

Del Piero (4), **Di Vaio** (4), **Nedved** (3), **Tacchinardi** (2), **Birindelli** (1), **Camoranesi** (1), **Davids** (1), **Montero** (1), **Salas** (1), **Trezeguet** (1).

● ASSISTS (leader)

Camoranesi (3).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: none.

Yellow cards: Tacchinardi (5), **Ferrara** (2), **Iuliano** (2), **Nedved** (2), **Fresi** (1), **Montero** (1), **Olivera** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Davids (23), **Tacchinardi** (20), **Montero** (18), **Ferrara** (16), **Iuliano** (16), **Nedved** (16).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Nedved (25), **Davids** (23), **Camoranesi** (19), **Del Piero** (19).

● WEAKNESSES

The ageing central defence – Ferrara is 36, Montero 31 – looks suspect against pace. Doubts remain over the fitness of Trezeguet and Del Piero; both have spent time on the sidelines this season with injuries.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

The plans to rebuild the Stadio delle Alpi, halving the capacity to around 36,000. The perimeter running track will go, executive boxes will be built and Juventus will own and run the stadium as their own concern, having purchased it from Turin city council.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

JUVE play a 4-3-1-2 formation, based on a defensive midfield trio of Davids, Tacchinardi and Camoranesi, and an attacking triumvirate of Del Piero, Trezeguet and Nedved.

Trezeguet is the central striker, with Di Vaio, Salas and Zalayeta as alternatives. Del Piero is the second striker, while Nedved floats behind the front two (option A) and looks for long-range shooting opportunities.

A more defensive alternative would see the six midfielders/attackers in a 4-1-1 formation, with Trezeguet as the lone striker and Nedved behind him (option B). This was used when Del Piero was injured, Di Vaio offering pace and cutting edge on the left and Tudor bringing more solidity to central midfield.

In defence, Montero and Ferrara are the first-choice centre-backs, although Thuram can move in from right-back, with Birindelli coming in on the flank. Zambrotta, nominally a midfielder, is an alternative to Pessotto at left-back, while Zenoni can fill a variety of positions.

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
22	Landry BONNEFOI (Fra)	20.09.83
1	Gianluigi BUFFON	28.01.78
12	Antonio CHIMENTI	30.06.70
	DEFENDERS	
15	Alessandro BIRINDELLI	12.11.74
2	Ciro FERRARA	11.02.67
6	Salvatore FRESI	18.01.73
43	Daniele GASTALDELLO	25.06.83
13	Mark IULIANO	12.08.73
4	Paolo MONTERO (Uru)	03.09.71
7	Gianluca PESSOTTO	11.08.70
21	Lilian THURAM (Fra)	01.01.72
5	Igor TUDOR (Cro)	16.04.78
14	Cristian ZENONI	23.04.77
	MIDFIELDERS	
16	Mauro CAMORANESI (Arg)	04.10.76
8	Antonio CONTE	31.07.69
26	Edgar DAVIDS (Hol)	13.03.73
11	Pavel NEDVED (Cze)	30.08.72
23	Ruben OLIVERA (Uru)	04.05.83
37	Matteo PARO	17.03.83
3	Alessio TACCHINARDI	23.07.75
19	Gianluca ZAMBROTTA	19.02.77
	FORWARDS	
10	Alessandro DEL PIERO	09.11.74
18	Marco DI VAIO	15.07.76
9	Marcelo SALAS (Chl)	24.12.74
40	Ivano SORRENTINO	07.03.83
17	David TREZEGUET (Fra)	15.10.77
25	Marcelo ZALAYETA (Uru)	05.12.78
	COACH	
	Marcello LIPPI	12.04.48

MANCHESTER UNITED

David Beckham

Alex Ferguson

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Sir Alex Ferguson

In his 17th season at the club and showing no signs of hanging up the hairdryer. The most successful manager in the history of English football.

● STADIUM

Old Trafford (cap 67,000). Bigger and better than ever and, significantly, the venue for the Champions League Final on May 28.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

David Beckham: selling United to a global audience.
Ruud Van Nistelrooy: goal machine, pure and simple.
Roy Keane: Ferguson's eyes and ears on the pitch.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYER THIS SEASON

Diego Forlan: finally finding the net after a frankly embarrassing start.

● MOST DISAPPOINTING PLAYERS THIS SEASON

Ryan Giggs: winger who has lost his way after 12 seasons at Old Trafford.
Rio Ferdinand: £24m buys the occasional embarrassing defensive blunder.

● BRIGHTEST HOPE

John O'Shea: Irish international defender who can play anywhere in the back four.

● GOALS

Van Nistelrooy (10), **Giggs** (4), **Veron** (4), **Solskjaer** (3), **Blanc** (1), **Brown** (1), **Forlan** (1), **G Neville** (1), **Scholes** (1).

● ASSISTS (leaders)

Veron (4), **Beckham** (3), **Solskjaer** (3), **Van Nistelrooy** (3).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: none.
Yellow cards: Veron (3), **Ferdinand** (2), **G Neville** (2), **P Neville** (2), **Ricardo** (2), **Butt** (1), **Fortune** (1), **O'Shea** (1), **Scholes** (1), **Silvestre** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

P Neville (21), **Butt** (17), **Scholes** (16), **Veron** (16), **O'Shea** (15).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Van Nistelrooy (16), **Butt** (12).

● WEAKNESSES

Lack of substitute options in attack. Without Van Nistelrooy and Solskjaer, United are toothless.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

A possible takeover of the club by Irish racehorse owners JP McManus and John Magnier. This raises the intriguing prospect of their friend Ferguson – whose horse Rock of Gibraltar is co-owned with Magnier's wife – being installed as club chairman.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

UNITED rarely deviate from a 4-4-2 formation. Alex Ferguson's only concession to European competition has been to play with split strikers – Giggs and/or Scholes in behind Van Nistelrooy (option A).

The absence of Keane through injury has disrupted many of Ferguson's plans this season, but has spared him the dilemma of how best to deploy Keane and Veron in central midfield. Veron has given some of his best performances in Europe on the left flank, with Ferguson pushing the out-of-sorts Ryan Giggs into attack (option A).

Keane has also been used in central defence, where his declining mobility is not as noticeable. This allows Veron to come inside alongside Phil Neville, with Giggs on the left. Either Scholes is used as a second striker, or Solskjaer plays alongside Van Nistelrooy in a more conventional 4-4-2 (option B).

O'Shea and the ageing Blanc provide cover in defence for the injury-prone Brown and accident-prone Ferdinand.

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
1	Fabien BARTHEZ (Fra)	28.06.71
13	Roy CARROLL (NI)	30.09.77
19	RICARDO Lopez (Spa)	30.12.71
44	Luke STEELE	24.09.84
	DEFENDERS	
5	Laurent BLANC (Fra)	19.11.65
24	Wes BROWN	13.10.79
6	Rio FERDINAND	07.11.78
38	Mark LYNCH	02.09.81
14	David MAY	24.06.70
2	Gary NEVILLE	18.02.75
3	Philip NEVILLE	21.01.77
22	John O'SHEA (Ire)	30.04.81
26	Daniel PUGH	19.10.82
34	Lee ROCHE	28.10.80
27	Mickael SILVESTRE (Fra)	09.08.77
39	Paul TIERNEY (Ire)	15.09.82
	MIDFIELDERS	
7	David BECKHAM	02.05.75
8	Nicky BUTT	21.01.75
15	Luke CHADWICK	18.11.80
45	Christopher EAGLES	19.11.85
31	Darren FLETCHER (Sco)	01.02.84
25	Quinton FORTUNE (SAf)	21.05.77
16	Roy KEANE (Ire)	10.08.71
42	Kieran RICHARDSON	21.10.84
18	Paul SCHOLES	16.11.74
17	Michael STEWART (Sco)	26.02.81
43	Mads TIMM (Den)	31.10.84
4	Juan Sebastian VERON (Arg)	09.03.75
	FORWARDS	
21	Diego FORLAN (Uru)	19.05.79
11	Ryan GIGGS (Wal)	29.11.73
40	Daniel NARDIELLO	22.10.82
20	Ole Gunnar SOLSKJAER (Nor)	26.02.73
10	Ruud VAN NISTELROOY (Hol)	01.07.76
	COACH	
	Alex FERGUSON (Sco)	31.12.41

MILAN

Filippo Inzaghi

Carlo Ancelotti

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Carlo Ancelotti
The former Parma and Juventus coach has shown a hitherto unknown side this season, breaking with convention that labelled him as a strict 4-4-2 man and, instead, fielding a team with attacking verve and panache. Signed a contract extension this season, but recent results in the Italian League have placed his future in doubt.

● STADIUM

Giuseppe Meazza, San Siro (cap 75,000). One of the most recognisable venues in world football. Three tiers of Milanese majesty.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Filippo Inzaghi: the classic penalty-box goal poacher.
Rui Costa: brilliant Portuguese midfield schemer.
Alessandro Nesta: key summer signing who has finally settled into central defence.
Andrea Pirlo: midfielder who has thrived in a new defensive role under Ancelotti.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYER THIS SEASON

Fernando Redondo: Argentinian midfield pivot who has returned from two years out with a serious knee injury.

● MOST DISAPPOINTING PLAYER THIS SEASON

Rivaldo: big summer signing who has so far not lived up to his illustrious reputation.

● GOALS

Inzaghi (9), **Shevchenko** (2), **Tomasson** (2), **Rivaldo** (1), **Seedorf** (1), **Serginho** (1).

● ASSISTS (leaders)

Rui Costa (5), **Seedorf** (3), **Kaladze** (2).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: none.
Yellow cards: Gattuso (3), **Pirlo** (2), **Seedorf** (2), **Ambrosini** (1), **Maldini** (1), **Serginho** (1), **Tomasson** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Gattuso (26), **Seedorf** (18), **Ambrosini** (14), **Maldini** (14).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Rivaldo (25), **Inzaghi** (19), **Pirlo** (19), **Seedorf** (18).

● WEAKNESSES

With so many players who need time and space on the ball – Rui Costa, Pirlo, Seedorf – Milan don't perform well against teams who hassle and press them.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

The conflict of interests inherent in having a club owner, Silvio Berlusconi, who is also Italy's Prime Minister, while the man running the club for Berlusconi, Adriano Galliani, is also president of the Italian League. Music to the ears of conspiracy theorists everywhere.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

CARLO ANCELOTTI has favoured a 4-3-2-1 formation this season, incorporating the attacking talents of Inzaghi, Rivaldo and Rui Costa into the same starting line-up.

In a back four, Maldini has moved from the left to the centre alongside Nesta, although he can still fill in at left-back if Kaladze is injured, with Costacurta coming into the centre. Simic is first-choice right-back, while Brazilian keeper Dida is first choice ahead of Abbiati.

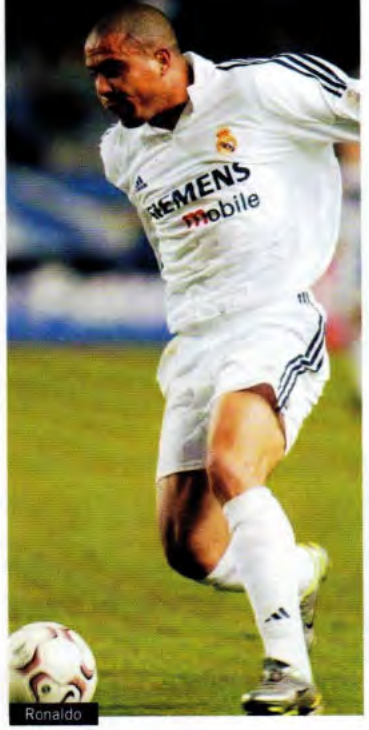
Pirlo, formerly an attacking midfielder, now fills the defensive pivot role, although Redondo can also take this position. Gattuso and Seedorf do the grafting on either flank, leaving Rui Costa and Rivaldo to scheme behind lone striker Inzaghi (option A).

An alternative formation is 4-3-1-2 (option B), with either Rivaldo or Rui Costa replaced by a second striker, Shevchenko or Tomasson, and Serginho providing a more attacking edge on the right flank.

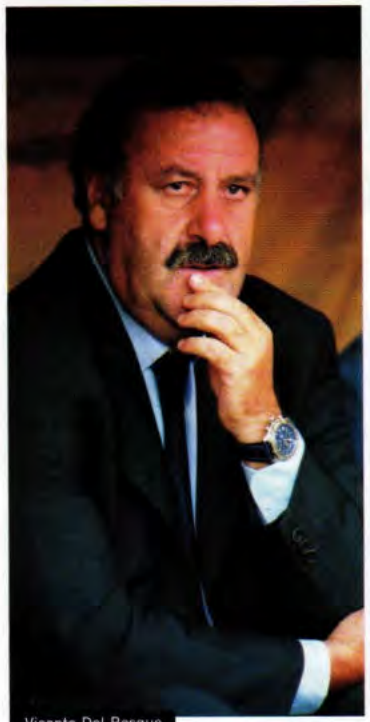
THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
18	Christian ABBIATI	08.07.77
12	DIDA (Bra)	07.10.73
1	Valerio FIORI	27.04.69
	DEFENDERS	
19	Alessandro COSTACURTA	24.04.66
2	Thomas HELVEG (Den)	24.06.71
4	Kakha KALADZE (Geo)	27.02.78
24	Martin LAURSEN (Den)	26.07.77
3	Paolo MALDINI	26.06.68
13	Alessandro NESTA	19.03.76
25	ROQUE JUNIOR (Bra)	31.08.76
14	Dario SIMIC (Cro)	12.11.75
42	Mirko STEFANI	25.01.84
	MIDFIELDERS	
23	Massimo AMBROSINI	29.05.77
83	Catilina AUBAMEYANG	01.09.83
32	Cristian BROCCHI	30.01.76
40	Mauro CALVI	17.04.84
28	Sam DALLA BONA	06.02.81
41	Mattia DEL BALLO	19.01.84
8	Gennaro GATTUSO	09.01.78
36	Stefano PASTRELLO	01.01.84
21	Andrea PIRLO	19.05.79
5	Fernando REDONDO (Arg)	06.06.69
10	RUI COSTA (Por)	29.03.72
20	Clarence SEEDORF (Hol)	01.04.76
27	SERGINHO (Bra)	27.06.71
	FORWARDS	
9	Filippo INZAGHI	09.08.73
33	LEONARDO (Bra)	05.09.69
11	RIVALDO (Bra)	19.04.72
7	Andrii SHEVCHENKO (Ukr)	29.09.76
15	Jon Dahl TOMASSON (Den)	29.08.76
	COACH	
	Carlo ANCELOTTI	10.06.59

REAL MADRID



Ronaldo


Vicente Del Bosque

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Vicente Del Bosque

Loveable uncle figure whose low-key approach gets the best from his star men and has already delivered two European Cups in three years. A one-club man, having joined the Madrid coaching staff at the end of his playing career, the highlight of which was playing in the 1981 European Cup Final.

● STADIUM

Santiago Bernabeu (cap 74,800). Named after the famous club president of the 1950s. There are plans to expand it to a capacity of almost 100,000, all-seated.

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Ronaldo: the most famous footballer on the planet.
Zinedine Zidane: Frenchman with brilliant technique and exquisite vision.
Raul: local boy and the most consistently brilliant footballer in the Madrid side.
Luis Figo: Portuguese winger with tons of tricks.
Roberto Carlos: Brazilian 'full-back' whose explosive pace and shooting enlivens the left flank.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYER THIS SEASON

Esteban Cambiasso: Argentinian midfielder who has found his feet after an uncertain start in Madrid.

● BRIGHTEST HOPE

Javier Portillo: young striker who broke all goalscoring records in Madrid's youth teams.

● GOALS

Raul (5), **Guti** (4), **McManaman** (2), **Ronaldo** (2), **Zidane** (2), **Celades** (1), **Figo** (1), **Michel Salgado** (1), **Portillo** (1), **Tote** (1).

● ASSISTS (leaders)

Raul (4), **Figo** (2), **Zidane** (2).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: none.
Yellow cards: Ivan Helguera (3), **Roberto Carlos** (2), **Flavio Conceicao** (1), **Makelele** (1), **Morientes** (1), **Pavon** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Ivan Helguera (24), **Michel Salgado** (16).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Figo (33), **Zidane** (33), **Guti** (18), **Makelele** (16).

● WEAKNESSES

Lack of defensive cover, with Hierro out for the season and doubts over Ivan Helguera's fitness.

● OFF-PITCH DISTRACTION

The constant speculation about who will be the next star to arrive at the Bernabeu this summer.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

MADRID favour an unashamedly attacking approach, designed to take advantage of the wonderful forward talent available to Del Bosque.

In midfield, Makelele and Flavio Conceicao (or Cambiasso) provide the defensive cover that enables everyone else to go forward. Raul, Zidane and Figo are the attacking triumvirate operating behind lone striker Ronaldo, who often drops deep to collect the ball and run at defenders (option A). Raul plays wide on the left in such a situation, but would play more centrally if Ronaldo is absent through injury and replaced by Portillo (option B). Here, Portillo and Raul would play together in a more conventional 4-4-2 formation, while Zidane would drop deeper and Roberto Carlos again has licence to bomb forward. McManaman and Solari could also fill a gap on the left flank.

In the absence of the injured Hierro, Pavon partners Ivan Helguera, a converted midfielder, in central defence, with Minambres another option.

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
1	Iker CASILLAS	20.05.81
13	CESAR Sanchez	02.09.71
25	Carlos SANCHEZ	19.01.78
	DEFENDERS	
4	Fernando HIERRO	23.03.68
6	IVAN HELGUERA	28.03.75
2	MICHEL SALGADO	22.10.75
17	Oscar MINAMBRES	01.02.81
22	Francisco PAVON	09.01.80
3	ROBERTO CARLOS (Bra)	10.04.73
29	RUBEN Gonzalez	29.01.82
	MIDFIELDERS	
19	Esteban CAMBIASSO (Arg)	18.08.80
20	Albert CELADES	29.09.75
10	Luis FIGO (Por)	04.11.72
16	FLAVIO CONCEICAO (Bra)	12.06.74
24	Claude MAKELELE (Fra)	18.02.73
8	Steve McMANAMAN (Eng)	11.02.72
27	Antonio NUNEZ	15.01.79
21	Santiago SOLARI (Arg)	07.10.76
5	Zinedine ZIDANE (Fra)	23.06.72
	FORWARDS	
14	GUTI	31.10.76
9	Fernando MORIENTES	05.04.76
18	Javier PORTILLO	30.03.82
7	RAUL Gonzalez	27.06.77
11	RONALDO (Bra)	22.09.76
12	TOTE	23.11.78
	COACH	
	Vicente DEL BOSQUE	23.12.50

VALENCIA

Pablo Aimar

Rafael Benitez

KEY FACTS

● MANAGER

Rafael Benitez
Former Real Madrid reserve team boss who surprised many by leading Valencia to the Spanish title last season. The quietly-spoken coach has forged a well-balanced side with a good mix of discipline and attacking flair.

● STADIUM

Mestalla (cap 43,000).

● MOST IMPORTANT PLAYERS

Pablo Aimar: brilliant Argentinian whose ball control and passing have inevitably attracted comparisons with Diego Maradona.

Santiago Canizares: Spain's first-choice goalkeeper. Back to his best after missing last year's World Cup following a freak injury (a dropped aftershave bottle gashed tendons in his foot).

Ruben Baraja: dynamic midfielder who controls the pace and tempo of Valencia's play.

Roberto Ayala: powerful, domineering centre-back and the cornerstone of Valencia's defence.

● MOST IMPROVED PLAYERS THIS SEASON

John Carew: giant striker who has won over the critics with a series of big-match performances. Just ask Arsenal.

Fabio Aurelio: left-sided defender whose assured touch has won him a starting place ahead of Carboni.

● MOST DISAPPOINTING PLAYER THIS SEASON

Miguel Angulo: not the convincing attacking midfielder that his talent suggests he should be.

● GOALS

Carew (5), **Baraja** (3), **Juan Sanchez** (3), **Aimar** (2), **Angulo** (2), **Fabio Aurelio** (2), **Mista** (2), **Curro Torres** (1), **Rufete** (1).

● ASSISTS (leaders)

Aimar (4), **Carew** (4), **Vicente** (3).

● DISCIPLINE

Red cards: Angulo (1), **Ayala** (1).
Yellow cards: Ayala (3), **Baraja** (3), **Mista** (3), **Pellegrino** (3), **Kily Gonzalez** (2), **Rufete** (2), **Aimar** (1), **Carboni** (1).

● MOST FOULS COMMITTED

Albelda (25), **Carew** (25), **Aimar** (17), **Ayala** (17), **Baraja** (17), **Pellegrino** (17), **Mista** (12), **Kily Gonzalez** (11).

● MOST FOULS SUFFERED

Aimar (31), **Baraja** (23), **Kily Gonzalez** (20), **Carew** (16).

● WEAKNESSES

Discipline – Valencia have one of the worst records in the competition.

STARTING LINE-UP

OPTION A

OPTION B

LIKE HIS predecessor as Valencia coach, Hector Cuper, Benitez has fashioned a side that is compact and highly competitive, relying heavily on the inventive skills of Aimar.

The defence, one of the meanest in Europe in recent seasons, is well marshalled by the centre-back pairing of Ayala and Pellegrino, with Djukic and Marchena in reserve. On the left Fabio Aurelio vies with the more combative Carboni for a starting place, while Reveillere has done well after replacing the injured Curro Torres at right-back. Canizares is one of Europe's top keepers.

Albelda and Baraja provide the dynamism in central midfield, with Vicente or Kily Gonzalez on the left and Rufete or Angulo on the right.

In attack, Carew is the target man, with Aimar playing behind him (option A). If Benitez goes for an extra striker, the more mobile Juan Sanchez is likely to feature alongside Carew, with Aimar missing out (option B).

THE SQUAD

	GOALKEEPERS	
1	Santiago CANIZARES	18.12.69
13	Andres PALOP	22.10.73
	DEFENDERS	
4	Roberto AYALA (Arg)	14.04.73
15	Amedeo CARBONI (Ita)	06.04.65
23	CURRO TORRES	27.12.76
5	Miroslav DJUKIC (Yug)	19.02.66
3	FABIO AURELIO (Bra)	24.09.79
24	Javier GARRIDO	01.07.79
12	Carlos MARCHENA	31.07.79
30	David NAVARRO	25.05.80
2	Mauricio PELLEGRINO (Arg)	05.10.71
33	Anthony REVEILLERE (Fra)	10.11.79
	MIDFIELDERS	
21	Pablo AIMAR (Arg)	03.11.79
6	David ALBELDA	01.09.77
31	Miguel ALBIOL	02.09.81
10	Miguel ANGULO	23.06.77
8	Ruben BARAJA	11.07.75
22	Gonzalo DE LOS SANTOS (Uru)	19.07.76
18	Cristian KILY GONZALEZ (Arg)	04.08.74
19	Francisco RUFETE	20.11.76
32	David SANCHEZ	29.01.81
16	Denis SERBAN (Rom)	05.01.76
14	VICENTE Rodriguez	16.07.81
	FORWARDS	
7	John CAREW (Nor)	05.09.79
11	JUAN SANCHEZ	15.05.72
20	MISTA	12.11.78
	COACH	
	Rafael BENITEZ	16.04.60

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